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# Recognizing Poverty in Boston's Asian American Community

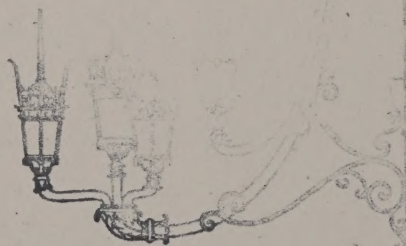


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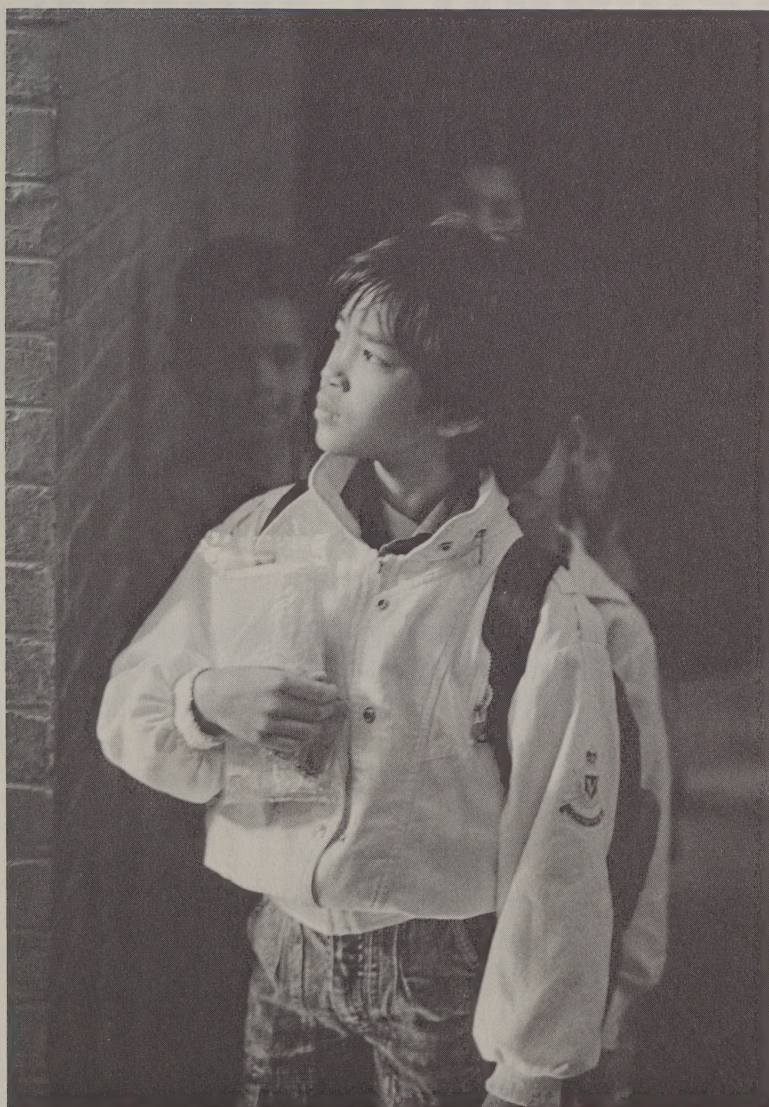
A Program Paper of the Boston Persistent Poverty Project

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# Recognizing Poverty in Boston's Asian American Community







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Carlton Sagara, Principal Researcher  
Peter Kiang, Ed.D., Editor

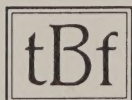
A Background Paper  
by the  
Asian American Resource Workshop for

*Beyond  
Poverty:*

***Building Community Through New Perspectives***

A Roundtable Series about Poverty in Boston

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# *Preface*

In 1985, the Boston Foundation set out on a new course. It chose to immerse itself more intensively in probing the conditions of poverty that adversely affect large segments of our population, and to take more responsibility for challenging poverty and its debilitating consequences for the Boston community. To give tangible expression to this commitment, the members of the Governing Board allocated \$10 million over five years for a grantmaking initiative that came to be called the "Poverty Impact Program." Several years later, The Rockefeller Foundation chose Boston — through the Boston Foundation — as one of six cities to participate in a national anti-poverty initiative.

For all the hope it engendered, the Boston Foundation's Poverty Impact Program unfolded against a disheartening background. We never envisioned, during the economic upswing of the mid-1980s, the kind of recession that has all but overwhelmed New England. And we didn't anticipate the further retreat, by government policy and practice, from funding services and providing even minimal underpinnings for the poor. We concluded the Poverty Impact Program with the sober realization that government — and, by extension, the larger society — has broken its social contract with those in struggle, with calamitous results for increasing numbers of people across this community and the nation.

The Boston Persistent Poverty Project continues to build on the lessons of the Poverty Impact Program. The Project seeks to refocus and mobilize community attention to urban poverty, to generate a body of locally-based information, and to develop initiatives to strengthen our community's capacity to address persistent poverty over the long term.

More than this, however, the Project seeks to transform the ways in which we think about intergenerational urban poverty and those who live in poverty — and to engage the will and understanding of each member of our community in an effort to end those conditions which are unnecessary, destructive of the best in all of us, and, finally, unacceptable.

This Roundtable series, and this document, are designed to help us break out of old myths about why poverty exists. They explore with a fresh eye the various ways in which poverty is experienced by different communities, and reach across these differences toward a common agenda for action.

By the end of this series, we hope to be able to recognize in one another essential parts of the solution to persistent poverty in our midst. Not until we see one another as interdependent and valued members of the same society, and accept the truth that each and every one of our children is worthy of our highest expectations and resources, will we find the political will and the means to reforge the basic social contract which underlies every successful community.

We express our gratitude to the 43 members of the Boston Persistent Poverty Project's Strategy Development Group, to the authors who prepared research documents as part of this series, to the participants of the Roundtable discussions, to the community-based and academic institutions which helped to conceptualize and coordinate "Beyond Poverty: Building Community Through New Perspectives," and to the members of the larger community who have come to share and to learn.

Anna Faith Jones  
President, The Boston Foundation





# *Acknowledgements*

This report, part of the Boston Foundation's Boston Persistent Poverty Project, is probably the most comprehensive study of poverty in Boston's Asian American community to date. It presents an overview of the history and issues of the Asian American community, the fastest growing population group in Boston and in the country, and summarizes the available data on poverty relating to this community. Many persons contributed to the writing of this report and I would like to acknowledge their assistance.

Special thanks to Dr. Peter Kiang of the University of Massachusetts/Boston for his careful editing which was always helpful in clarifying the text, and for his advice, references, and insightful comments which did much to improve the analysis of the data. Michael Liu, Executive Director of the Asian American Resource Workshop (AARW) kindly donated his essay on the history of the Chinese community in Boston and also provided a sounding board during the writing of this report. Over the last thirteen years, the AARW has devoted considerable time and resources to gathering data on the Asian American community. Many of the people involved with this study have been involved in one capacity or another with the AARW, and its involvement in the community was critical in providing the basic information and contacts upon which the study is based.

Suzanne Lee, chairperson of the Chinese Progressive Association and member of the Poverty Project's Strategy Development Group, provided an important perspective in understanding poverty in the Asian American community. Her unflagging commitment to the empowerment of the Asian American community is an inspiration and guide. AARW Intern Shauna Lo, from UMass/Boston, collected many of the reports and publications upon which this study was based. She also scheduled, coordinated, and participated in the focus groups and interviews which provided important information and insights into poverty in the community.

Since there is little current or detailed published data on poverty in the Asian American community, this study supplemented the available information by conducting a series of focus groups and interviews with persons whose work in this community gives them special insight into the problems faced by Asian Americans. The focus group and interview participants in the "Health" area included Dr. Jean Chin and Ms. Davy Um Heder. Participants in the "Employment/Unemployment and the Economy" focus group included Ms. Lydia Lowe, Ms. Beverly Wing, and Ms. Moira Lucey. Participants in the focus groups and interviews covering the Cambodian and Vietnamese communities included Ms. Debbie Tom, Mr. Binh Nguyen, Mr. Peter Chea, and Mr. Hiep Chu. In addition, a number of persons were helpful in providing information for this report. Their names are listed at the back of the book. Any omission to this list was unintentional and is regretted. All of these people are providing invaluable services to the Asian American community, and their assistance and participation in the focus groups and interviews are greatly appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank the Boston Foundation's Boston Persistent Poverty Project for initiating this study. The Foundation's commitment to community empowerment reflects an understanding that the welfare of all persons is essential to the creation of a just and prosperous society.

While many people's insights and information contributed to this report, its writing was my responsibility, and any errors of fact or analysis are mine.

Carlton Sagara, Principal Researcher  
Asian American Resource Workshop





# *The Boston Persistent Poverty Project*

The Boston Persistent Poverty Project is a long-term, collaborative campaign to eliminate chronic, intergenerational poverty in Boston. It convenes grassroots and institutional leaders for joint strategic planning, research, organizing, and community-building initiatives in alliance with the entire Boston community.

Guided by representatives of community organizations, government, labor, business, foundations, and academic and religious institutions, the Project promotes and monitors a number of specific initiatives. These include programs designed to improve the education, housing, employment, health, safety, and self-esteem of all children and their families in Boston's neighborhoods.

Project activities are designed to build on the strengths, assets, and cultural traditions of communities of greatest need, and to empower those living in poverty — especially people of color — to advocate on their own behalf for civic actions and government policies that will reduce persistent poverty.

The underlying assumption of the Boston Persistent Poverty Project is that effective solutions to poverty require the creativity and participation of all sectors of our democratic society. The goal is nothing less than a reaffirmation of the basic, now broken, “social contract” which states, very simply, that all members of a society are responsible to and for one another, and are, ultimately, interdependent.

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

The Boston Persistent Poverty Project began in 1987 as one component of an anti-poverty initiative of The Rockefeller Foundation called “Equal Opportunity for the Urban Poor.” As one of six cities participating in the Community Planning and Action Project, the goal in Boston, as elsewhere, is to seek effective local strategies to eliminate the cyclical nature of poverty.

The first activity of the Boston Project was to conduct a survey of 17,000 poor and non-poor residents of Boston. This survey, *In the Midst of Plenty*, was published in 1989. It revealed that while the economic “miracle” of the 1980s had significantly increased the standard of living for the majority of Boston residents, it had failed to improve the circumstances of many residents of Boston's neighborhoods, particularly women, single parents, and families in the city's communities of color. It also revealed that, regardless of income or ethnic group, all people share the same fundamental aspirations — for a job with a living wage, a home, health care, and a good education for their children. The hope of the Project then was to harness Boston's economic boom to lift those who had been left behind due to poverty.

By the time the survey was published, however, the unanticipated “bottoming-out” of the Massachusetts economy, and the state's own fiscal crisis, had set in motion a harsh new reality for the poorest residents of Boston. Like many others in the Commonwealth, poor people now found themselves in the midst not of “plenty” but of a painfully contracting economy.

The Boston Persistent Poverty Project responded in late 1990 by convening a diverse group of community activists, academics, and civic, religious, and labor leaders to develop a long-term approach to eradicating persistent poverty in Boston.

The 43-member Strategy Development Group, as it is called, has struggled at times, particularly with ways to discuss racial and ethnic issues. Over the course of many meetings, the group's discussions have fostered an environment of openness and trust rare in Boston among a group so diverse in terms of ethnic heritage, race, class, and professional background.

With the assistance of this group, the Boston Project is beginning to identify key goals and strategies — and to put into place the conceptual and institutional framework — for a collaborative campaign to eliminate chronic poverty among children and their families in Boston. The initial framework includes:

- regular reports and analyses on poverty in general and on the economic status and well-being of children, families, and communities in Boston;
- the convening of policymakers with academics and community experts to evaluate proposed public policy initiatives in light of recent research findings;
- the development of collaborative communications and training networks to convey and share critical information and skills;
- the development of short- and long-term community-building strategies informed by the perspectives, experiences, and recommendations of the poor themselves;
- the strengthening of working relationships and a deepening of the dialogue and debate about poverty among all sectors in the city, as reflected in this document and in the Roundtable series for which it was prepared.

These activities will, in turn, assist in shaping community-building initiatives and more effective public policies to reduce persistent poverty in Boston.

## THE ROUNDTABLE SERIES

One of the initial findings of the surveys and forums conducted by the Boston Persistent Poverty Project was that persistent poverty manifests itself somewhat differently among various groups. In order to promote a greater understanding of particular and shared obstacles to economic mobility, the Project is sponsoring a series of Roundtable discussions.

Informed by background information from academic and research institutions, these structured discussions explore and describe the nature of the experience of persistent poverty among the various groups most affected by it (Latinos, Blacks, Whites, Asians, single parents, and youth). The Roundtables are also designed to highlight the recent achievements, hopes, and aspirations of these groups.

Through these discussions, the Boston Persistent Poverty Project seeks to achieve a new competency in understanding ethnic, racial, and other differences and similarities among groups in order to build a unique community capacity to tackle persistent poverty. The Roundtables are designed to explore problems and strengths across communities in order to create “macro” solutions to persistent poverty. They also examine the particular problems and strengths of distinct communities in order to tailor “micro” solutions and policies.

Information and ideas generated from these Roundtable discussions will inform and guide the future strategies and initiatives of the Boston Persistent Poverty Project.

# *Introduction*

This Program Paper of the Boston Persistent Poverty Project clearly indicates that significant levels of poverty exist within Boston's Asian American community. But because of current gaps in the research available on Asian Americans in Boston, this study should be read as much for what it does not say as for what it does.

Asian Americans are not specifically included in most major research studies on poverty, and usually appear only as a footnote in the aggregated "other" category. When information on Asian Americans is gathered or reported, it is often aggregated as part of a geographic area which includes many non-Asians, so that the specific conditions of Asian Americans are averaged away. Even the category "Asian" is problematic in relation to research on poverty, because individual nationalities may have particular problems or characteristics which require special attention, but which are masked by the broad category "Asian."

Perhaps the Asian American population in Boston is overlooked in research studies because it is extremely diverse — even fragmented — and consists of many languages and nationality groups; or perhaps because it comprises a relatively small proportion of the Boston population (only slightly more than five percent). It is clear from the information included in this study, however, that the challenges and strengths of Boston's Asian American community deserve increased attention by researchers, funders, and policymakers.

This study is one in a number that will be released during continuing research being conducted on chronic, concentrated urban poverty by the Boston Persistent Poverty Project. The Project's efforts to understand persistent poverty in Boston led first to a large and comprehensive survey published in 1989 as *In the Midst of Plenty*. Because of the relatively small size of Boston's Asian American community and its multiplicity of languages, it was not represented in that survey of 17,000 poor and non-poor Bostonians. This study seeks to begin to remedy this lack of information by analyzing poverty as it applies to the Asian American community in Boston.





# *Sources of Data*

Information on Asian Americans in Boston is limited to the U.S. Census, records of city and state government agencies, and focused studies of specific Asian groups, primarily the refugee and Chinatown communities. This study draws on all of these sources to paint a picture of Boston's Asian Americans, and to make some statements about poverty in the Asian American community in 1991.

The figures used to describe Asian Americans in Boston are not as comprehensive as we hoped they could be. Some of the most important factors contributing to poverty, such as English-language ability, type of employment, level of education, the dynamics of poverty in different communities, and the aspirations and frustrations of Asian Americans themselves, are not available in the form of data about all Asian groups.

In addition, various data sources are not entirely compatible. They cover different years; use different sampling methods; and describe different geographic, age, income, occupation, and other categories. Though we had hoped to make this study compatible with *In the Midst of Plenty*, which dealt primarily with working-age Bostonians, the diversity of the data about Asian Americans in Boston has made this difficult; numbers and percentages, unless otherwise noted, should be understood as covering the entire population of Asian/Pacific Islanders rather than a particular age group.

The 1990 Census census tract information, which would give us an idea of poverty in Boston's Asian community through such statistics as employment patterns and educational levels by neighborhood, will not be available until mid-to-late 1992. Beyond general 1990 Census population figures, the primary sources of data for this study are the 1980 Census, more recent studies by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), the state's Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants (MORI), and an oversample by Paul Osterman in conjunction with *In the Midst of Plenty* which was too small to be statistically significant but which provides in-depth information on several population groups. This study also makes use of recent reports from the Boston Public Schools, the Boston Housing Authority (BHA), the Massachusetts Department of Health and Hospitals, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare.

Nationally, Census officials admit that the 1990 Census may have undercounted the Asian/Pacific Islander population by about 5 percent, and in Boston, the 1990 Census figures may have overlooked as much as 80 percent of the Cambodian population. The Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants, for example, while seeking to document the number of Asian Americans receiving public welfare, discovered that a large number of Asians were coded under other national or ethnic groups such as Russians or Latinos.

According to the 1990 Census, there are more Japanese, East Indians, Koreans, or Filipinos in Boston than Cambodians, but available data suggest that the former groups are significantly better off than the Cambodians and the Vietnamese, and generally do not fall into the "poverty" category. The Chinese are considered in this study because, while they appear to be doing relatively well economically (when national, average figures are used), these numbers are misleading. National income figures apparently average out what would otherwise be a bi-modal distribution of incomes, whose two peaks represent the urban and the suburban Chinese communities.

For example, the 1980 median income for Chinese households in the greater Boston area was \$16,790, while the median income for Chinatown was only \$9,059 — and \$12,136 for Asian American households in the city of Boston. While this argument may also apply to East Indians, Koreans, and Filipinos, and while their proportion of Boston's Asian population (12.4 percent in 1980 and 13.6 percent in 1990) is considerable, we were not able to obtain income figures for these groups. Nor are they, like the Chinese in Chinatown, concentrated in any particular census tract to allow for geographic inferences.

Pacific Islanders and the remaining Asian groups constitute only about 6.6 percent of Boston's Asian and Pacific Islander populations, and information about them is generally not available in existing studies and reports. Therefore, these groups are not specifically included except as part of the Asian American population as a whole. Specifically, then, this report concentrates on the issue of poverty among the Cambodian, Chinese, and Vietnamese communities in Boston.

Given the scarcity of data, we have supplemented available information by conducting four focus groups with individuals whose experience has enabled them to develop a comprehensive understanding of — and vision for — the Asian American community in Boston.



# *Executive Summary*

## *Introduction*

All indications of this study show that significant levels of poverty exist within Boston's Asian American community. Perhaps more telling is this study's discovery of the outstanding lack of research material on Asian Americans and poverty in general. Even the existing research is often prone to gaps and inconsistencies. Because of this, this study should be read as much for what it does not say as for what it does.

This study is part of continuing research by the Boston Foundation's Boston Persistent Poverty Project. The project's efforts to understand persistent poverty in Boston led first to a comprehensive survey published in 1989, *In the Midst of Plenty*. Boston's Asian and Pacific Islander population was not represented in this study because of the small size of the city's population and its multiplicity of languages. This report seeks to remedy this lack of information.

## *Sources of Data*

With the detailed census tract information of the 1990 Census not yet available, the 1980 Census is used as the primary source for this study. Reports of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the state's Department of Mental Health and the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants have also been used as major sources.

There are pitfalls in relying on this data. It is important to note, for instance, that the 1990 Census may have overlooked 80 percent of the Cambodian population in Boston. While we hoped to make this study compatible with *In the Midst of Plenty*, the diversity of the data has made this impossible.

This study focuses specifically on the Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Chinese communities in Boston. While there are more Japanese, East Indians, Koreans, or Filipinos in Boston than Cambodians, data suggest that the former groups are considerably better off economically than Cambodians and Vietnamese. The Chinese are considered in this study because, while national average figures have them doing relatively well economically, these figures are the average of a bi-modal distribution of incomes.

Given the scarcity of data, we have supplemented our study by conducting four focus groups made up of individuals whose experiences have enabled them to form a comprehensive understanding of the Asian American community.

## *The Asian American Experience*

Any attempt to understand Asian American poverty and the Asian American community must look at the immigrant and refugee experience. Asian Americans often come to the

United States from situations that make our standard of living seem opulent. Many come with a strong sense of responsibility for the sacrifice of those left behind who helped them come here and a history of surviving conditions more difficult than they now face in the United States. This combination of realities often fuels Asian American's strong drive to succeed.

There are, of course, steep odds against the success of an immigrant or refugee, one of the most pervasive being the language barrier. Besides this challenge, immigrants or refugees must also adjust to a culture with unfamiliar values that are often in conflict with their own. And finally, this group must face the history and structural reality of racism in America.

One of the parameters which defines the place of Asian Americans in our social matrix is that of "model minority." It is a label that is both seductive and dangerous; hidden behind its seeming praise is a standard by which other minorities are measured and an implied quality of life that is often far from reality for Asian Americans themselves. And as we will see, it obscures the plight of a major portion of their community.

## **DRAMATIC GROWTH**

According to the 1990 Census, people of Asian descent are the fastest growing population group in the United States. Between 1980 and 1990 Boston's Asian and Pacific Islander population grew by 95.6 percent to 30,388.

In 1980, the five largest nationality groups in Massachusetts were the Chinese, Asian Indians, Koreans, Japanese, and Filipinos, in that order. In 1990, the five largest Asian nationality groups were, in order, the Chinese, Asian Indians, Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Koreans. The growth of the Asian American community as a whole and the shift among relative populations reflect a change in the Asian American community resulting from immigration and Southeast Asian refugee resettlement.

## **THE CHINESE COMMUNITY**

In 1870, a trickle of Chinese immigrants to Massachusetts began when a group of 75 Chinese workers were recruited to break a strike at a shoe factory in North Adams. But in 1878 the Chinese famine helped nurture fears that the United States would be overrun by Chinese, and growing racist sentiment led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This act effectively stopped any large-scale immigration of Chinese "laborers" for the next 85 years.

Because of laws against interracial marriages, cultural prohibitions, and Exclusion Laws the primarily young, single Chinese men recruited to work often remained without families. Nevertheless, Boston's Chinatown was firmly established by 1880 with a mostly male population of 200.

After the Second World War the Chinatown economy began to show signs of change. During this period the restaurant and garment industries won their place as the main source of employment for immigrant Chinese workers, and the War Brides Act allowed some families to be established and reunited. In 1965, the Immigration Reform Act equalized the number of persons permitted to immigrate to 20,000 per country per year, but as the number of eligible Chinese immigrants grew, housing in Chinatown was being destroyed. Many Chinese settled in other parts of the city.

More recently, the garment industry has declined and many Chinese women have been forced to find retraining in fields including food service, medical technology, and clerical work. The availability of these jobs and those in the restaurant industry — the major source of employment for Chinese males — is being affected by the recession.

Chinatown has been the first stop for many Chinese immigrants, and even as the physical community has no room left to expand, it remains the cultural hub for the community at large. In 1985, the Boston Redevelopment Authority's household surveys estimated the population of Chinatown proper to be 5,100.

## THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY

In 1975 South Vietnam fell to the communists, and the first wave of Vietnamese refugees — 120,000 in all — entered the United States. About 1,000 of these came to Massachusetts. The large influx of Vietnamese began in the years 1979–1981, and this second wave, in general, had less education, less prior urban or Western contact and came from more impoverished backgrounds than the first. Over this period the Massachusetts Vietnamese refugee population increased from 2,000 to 10,000. Current census information places this population at 15,449 persons.

Since 1981, the Orderly Departure Program, the Amerasian Homecoming Act and the release of long-term political detainees has brought more Vietnamese refugees to the United States and the Commonwealth. Vietnamese in Massachusetts are concentrated in the Dorchester and Allston-Brighton neighborhoods of Boston, and in the towns of Lawrence, Chelsea, Malden, Salem, Amherst, Springfield, Worcester, and Quincy.

The Chinese Vietnamese are included under this heading because of their country of origin and refugee status. Because of this group's entrepreneurial skill and multilingual, multicultural backgrounds, it offers an important resource and bridge between the Vietnamese and Chinese communities.

## THE CAMBODIAN COMMUNITY

When the Khmer Rouge overthrew Cambodia's American-backed government in 1975, about 5,571 Cambodians entered the United States, and of these 54 came to Massachusetts. In 1979, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia triggered the exodus of about half a million refugees to Thailand, but it was not until 1981 that a large influx of Cambodians began to make its way to Massachusetts.

Massachusetts, in fact, became the second-most preferred state in the nation for Cambodian resettlement, and by 1989 the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants counted 5,362 Cambodians in Boston and 18,335 in Massachusetts. Most of these have settled in Lowell. The 1990 Census counted 15,971 Asian and Pacific Americans in Lowell, but community leaders have estimated the number may be as high as 25,000.



## *Asian Americans and Poverty*

According to a 1990 report by the General Accounting Office, Asian Americans in 1985 participated nationally in public assistance programs at about the same rate as the rest of the population. Perhaps more revealing is the report's note that, proportionately, "newly arrived Southeast Asian refugees are much more likely to receive assistance than Asian Americans overall, in part because of special programs established to help refugees."

Today, only refugees without children to support them have access to such programs, and over the last decade the duration of this assistance has shrunk from three years to eight months. In this way, the Federal government has shifted the responsibility for refugee families onto the states. While the number of Cambodians arriving in Massachusetts has fallen sharply, Vietnamese, primarily former political prisoners and children of American service men and Vietnamese mothers (Amerasians), continue to arrive in Massachusetts in relatively large numbers.

A 1989 Massachusetts Department of Mental Health study found that among the Vietnamese it surveyed over one-half were on welfare assistance. Information also suggests that about half of Boston's Cambodian population is receiving welfare benefits.

At least two-thirds of the current Asian population are immigrants, and though the concept of "poverty in America which persists across generations" cannot apply yet to most of this group, poverty itself is a fact of life for many. This study concentrates on what this means for the Cambodian, Chinese, and Vietnamese communities in Boston.

## *Asian American Demographics*

### **NATIONAL, MASSACHUSETTS AND BOSTON STATISTICS**

As a result of reforms of American immigration and refugee policy implemented after 1965, the population of many Asian groups in the United States has increased dramatically.

- Between 1980 and 1990 in Boston, the two largest population increases were experienced by Latinos and Asian Americans.
- During this period, Boston's Asian American community grew by 96 percent.
- Chinese Americans make up 54.96 percent of Boston's Asian American population; Cambodians make up 3.3 percent; and Vietnamese comprise 15.64 percent. All three groups experienced growth between 1980 and 1990.
- In 1980, 74.8 percent of Asian Americans in Boston were foreign born. The estimate for 1990 is 70 percent, or 21,272 people.

## FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS

The common assumption that “family” is important for Asian Americans is, in fact, borne out by data. In 1990, Asian American families were overwhelmingly “traditional,” consisting of a couple with or without children. Married couples comprised 75 percent of all Asian households in Boston, compared to 58.6 percent for the city in general.

- Asians in Boston tend to have slightly larger families than the city average, 3.9 persons versus 3.3 persons in 1990.
- The extended family is a significant part of the family structure. Nationally, in 1980, 28 percent of recent immigrant Chinese families and 55 percent of Vietnamese families were living in extended households. This reflects cultural preferences and also a strategy for economic survival.

## INCOME

Asian Americans living outside Boston are considerably better off financially than their counterparts in the city. In 1980, Asian households in Chinatown were more than twice as likely to have incomes of less than \$10,000 a year compared to Asian Americans in the greater Boston area (excluding Boston).

According to the Population Reference Bureau, poverty rates for immigrants and refugees are highest for recent arrivals. It should be noted that except for arrivals from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Vietnam, poverty rates for immigrants in general are relatively low regardless of year of arrival. For Taiwan and Hong Kong immigrants this reflects not only persons immigrating under skills preference laws, but also persons immigrating under family preference laws. For Vietnamese immigrants the poverty rate is considerably higher than for most recent arrivals, which may reflect Vietnam’s “second wave” of refugees, many of whom had little formal education.

- In 1980, 32.6 percent of Asian households in Boston had incomes of less than 125 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines. The 1990 rate of poverty for Asians is estimated to be about the same.
- It is estimated that about half of the Cambodian population is receiving welfare benefits. A study done in 1989 found that over half of the Vietnamese surveyed were receiving welfare assistance.
- In 1991, approximately 74 percent of Asians living in Charlestown lived in public housing.

## EMPLOYMENT

Boston’s Asian Americans can be divided into two groups: a poorer, less well-educated group living in the city itself, and a more affluent, better-educated group in the suburbs. In 1980, Asians in suburban Boston were almost twice as likely to be employed as professionals than Asians in the city of Boston.

Asians are far more likely than non-Asians to find occupations in the service sector and as machine operators. Asian American women comprised 16.8 percent of all textile sewing machine operators in greater Boston — more than five times their presence in this population. Asian American men in the category “cooks, except short order” comprised 9 percent of this work force — about three times their proportion of the population.

- In 1980, Asians comprised about 3 percent of Boston’s work force, but comprised 5.8 percent of Boston’s service workers.
- In 1980, 24 percent of households in Chinatown had three or more workers, compared to 14 percent for Boston as a whole.
- It is estimated that about a quarter of Chinese restaurant workers are currently unemployed.
- A 1986 study estimated that the unemployment rate in the Vietnamese community was 40 percent.

## EDUCATION

The stereotype of “model minority” is often reinforced by the accomplishments of exceptional Asian American students. While the proportion of Asian American college graduates surpasses that of the national population, in fact, in 1980 a larger proportion of Asian Americans had less than a 9th grade education than the national rate.

- Census tract information shows that Chinatown residents’ educational attainment is lower than Boston’s Asian American population as a whole.
- In 1985, excluding exam schools, the dropout rate for Asians in Boston’s public schools was 30 percent for males and about 25 percent for females.

## ENGLISH FLUENCY

A 1980 report by the Association of Asian/Pacific Community Health Organizations found that “about 95 percent of primarily low-income patients nationwide had limited or no ability to speak English.” According to a General Accounting Office report, 59 percent of Cambodians, 38 percent of Vietnamese, and 23 percent of Chinese spoke English “not well” or “not at all.”

- Interpretation of recent studies by the DMH and the General Accounting Office suggests that over 80 percent of Vietnamese and over 90 percent of Cambodians have problems understanding English.

## HOUSING

A 1991 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston revealed that Asians were 1.4 times as likely as whites to be rejected for mortgages in Boston. Asians comprised 2.7 percent of those who successfully received loan applications for mortgages in 1990, although their population in the city represents 5.16 percent.



For all Asian Americans in Boston, the proportion of households where people outnumbered rooms was 25 percent. For Chinatown's Asian American households the percent was 36.7 percent. For Boston in general, the proportion of households where people outnumbered rooms was 4.2 percent.

- In 1990, about 81 percent of Asians in Boston were renters, as compared to 69 percent for the city in general.
- In 1980, the median number of persons per housing unit for Boston in general was 1.96 persons, and 2.57 for Asians.

## HEALTH

A national study found that Asians have a longer life expectancy and lower mortality rate than the country in general. These findings, however, reflect only those Asian groups who are relatively well-off economically. Southeast Asians, in fact, suffer infection from tuberculosis, hepatitis B, and malaria at rates much higher than the population as a whole.

- A 1990 report indicated that Southeast Asian refugees suffered an infection rate from tuberculosis which was almost 28 times the national rate.
- Infant mortality rates among Asian Americans appear to be better than for the city in general, with one death out of 528 in 1987 and two deaths out of 580 in 1988.

## MENTAL HEALTH

Because the techniques of American psychotherapy are not congruent with Asian styles of interpersonal relations, the issue of Asian American mental health is complicated from an American perspective. In recognition of this, the Massachusetts Department of Health and Human Services and the Massachusetts Office of Refugee Resettlement entered into an inter-agency agreement in 1985 with the National Institute of Mental Health to encourage the development and implementation of culturally relevant diagnostic and treatment procedures.

- A 1989 study of Cambodian, Haitian, and Vietnamese refugees found that housing, limited English skills, daily living skills, depression and unresolved grief were identified as the top five problems by all three groups.
- The GAO cites a 1986–1987 study conducted in California that found that “40 percent of the 2,733 refugees interviewed had a moderate or severe need for mental health treatment.”
- The language barrier was identified by both Cambodians and Vietnamese as the major obstacle to receiving mental health services.

## *From Barriers to Dreams*

The Boston that Asian Americans come to today is different from the Boston they would have found a century or two ago. Advancement beyond unskilled employment in our current market requires far more capital than hard work and loyalty to an employer.

This study has found that for Asian Americans poverty is affected by how they come to America, where they come from, and the conditions and attitudes they find when they arrive. Boston's economic reality is only part of this picture.

Among the conditions newly arrived Asians find are confusing stereotypes and lack of role models in the mass media. This study has talked about the damaging use of the "model minority" stereotype. Competing with this is the "yellow peril" stereotype exemplified by Japan-bashing, reporting on Asian gangs, the perception that Asian Americans are not appropriate for leadership roles, and finally, the perception that immigrants, especially refugees, are a drain on the economy. In order to refocus popular perceptions and prepare meaningful public policy, we need an aggressive agenda of community-based research and advocacy.

On top of this misinformation, this report has found an outstanding lack of research in general. While this study is a summary of data on Asian Americans that we found to be relatively accessible, even these data are inconsistent or lack sufficient detail.

Unfortunately, Asian Americans are frequently left to their own individual efforts to overcome social and structural barriers. Recognizing the realities and complexities of Asian Americans in Boston, as this report has attempted to do, is a basic but essential step forward.

It is only a first step, and in summary this study offers two recommendations:

That consensus be developed among appropriate foundations, government agencies, service agencies, image makers, and community organizations to recognize and respond institutionally to the reality of Asian American poverty in Boston.

That the capacity be developed within the Asian American community, in coordination with appropriate foundations, public agencies, and universities, to conduct ongoing and systematic research and policy analysis, and programmatic initiatives on issues and trends relevant to poverty and Asian Americans in Boston.

*The Asian American  
Experience*





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# *The Asian American Experience*

Central to understanding Asian American poverty and the entire Asian American community is an understanding of the refugee and immigrant experience. When Vietnamese or Cambodian refugees in Boston acknowledge that life in America is difficult and uncertain, it is also with the memory of the danger and insecurity they left behind. For thousands who spent months or years in refugee camps, electric lights, indoor plumbing, and supermarkets are luxuries. The streets of Boston may be dangerous by American standards, but are relatively safe compared to those of a war-torn country under military rule.

Ronald Takaki, in his book, *Strangers From a Different Shore*, suggests that Asian immigrants and refugees are survivors and adventurers. They are a group willing to take risks, to recognize and seize opportunities. They draw from traditions which have helped them survive in more difficult situations than they now find in the United States. In addition, many refugees and immigrants carry a profound sense of purpose — launching new lives in America based on the great sacrifice of others left behind. They come here to establish themselves so that their families may later join them, or through the efforts of parents who sacrifice so that their children might have a better education and future in this country. The drive and energy of the refugee or immigrant is rooted in commitments to others, rather than in individual ambition. Choices are made and careers chosen with these expectations and responsibilities to others in mind.

As with previous groups of refugees and immigrants, America represents not only a physical move, but a new life with all its possibilities. This sense of a new beginning, coupled with survival skills developed in more difficult socio-economic conditions, can endow the immigrant and refugee with an optimism not felt by the native born. The abundance — to the point of waste — of life in America, reinforces this optimism with individual accomplishments that may seem, at times, astonishing.

But socio-economic success is not something achieved by all, nor is it the result of cultural determinism or some inborn quality of race. A large part of this success is the result of the immigrant experience itself. If we look at Asian populations who have been in the United States for generations, their pattern of achievement is more like that of other “minorities.” Finally, it should be understood that material gains often come at the price of hundred-hour work weeks and neglected or alienated families. “Success,” in these terms, may not equal “quality of life,” as many immigrants discover in time.

Despite the glow of promise of their new surroundings, immigrants and refugees often confront obstacles which prevent them from fully utilizing their skills or realizing their aspirations. One of the greatest problems is the language barrier, which restricts them from associating with people outside their linguistic group. This is a major issue, mentioned by all of our interviewees. Its implications are profound, and permeate the Asian American experience. The General Accounting Office, in its 1990 report *Asian Americans: A Status Report*, notes that the Association of Asian/Pacific Community Health Organizations found that “about 95 percent of its primary low-income patients nationwide had limited or no ability to speak English” (GAO-1)\*

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\*For full bibliographic information on this and subsequent references, see the reference list at the back of this book.

The language barrier means that many Asian Americans are confined to industries within their own communities or to jobs which require only minimal English-speaking ability — usually low-skilled and low-paid. Immigrants or refugees are also confronted with the English language facility of their children. Greater command of English gives the child a power within the family that reverses roles and disrupts the traditional family structure, as the child, rather than the parent, becomes the decision-maker and mediator between family and society.

Besides learning a new language, immigrants or refugees must also adjust to a culture with values unfamiliar and often in conflict with their own. If they want to open a store, they can no longer simply rent a space, buy some stock, and hang a sign, as they may have done in Asia. Now they must also deal with innumerable rules and regulations, frustrating even for native-born Americans.

Coming from societies where group associations are part of one's identity and where collective behavior and responsibility are important parts of life, the extreme individualism of American society is in one sense liberating, freeing the individual from being accountable to the group, but it also creates severe problems. A frequent lament is that "children no longer respect their parents and do not consider the family," meaning that parents would like their children, even adult children, to obey them and live with the family. Such an expectation, however, conflicts with the American traditions of the nuclear family, self-sufficiency, separation, autonomy, and even civil rights. That children and women have rights equal to those of a man can be unsettling to an immigrant family, especially if children and women begin to assert themselves socially and to participate in the American economy.

Immigrants and refugees cannot cut themselves off from their pasts. Families remain in Asia who depend on money sent by relatives in the United States. For the newly arrived who do not speak or understand English and who may have only limited job skills, the obligation to share their limited income with family members remaining in Asia can be a significant burden. Yet it must be done, and this responsibility adds to the newcomer's constellation of stresses, including past trauma, economic survival, and the overturning of old values, expectations, and ways of dealing with life.

Finally, refugees and immigrants must confront the history and structural reality of racism in America, a system in which social relations and advantage for one group are maintained over those of others. One of the parameters which defines the place of Asian Americans in this social matrix is that of the "model minority." Numerous Asian American commentators have analyzed this label as a positioning of Asian Americans between whites and blacks. According to this image, Asian Americans represent a "model" of hard work and self-reliance, rather than of protest and movement toward political empowerment.

The label "model minority" is both seductive and dangerous. On the one hand, being a "model minority" can be favorably perceived, since "model" does have positive connotations. Psychologically, it establishes an expectation for a certain level or type of achievement, which many Asian Americans then set out to validate. But having a "model minority" creates the possibility of blaming others for their lack of achievement. "If the Asians can do it," African Americans or Latinos — and even other Asians — are told, "why can't you?" Like other tactics of victim-blaming, this attitude absolves individuals and institutions from taking any action to establish a more just society. Moreover — as this study reveals — the lives of Asian Americans in Boston are filled with difficulties which contradict the basic premise of the "model minority" image.



## **DRAMATIC GROWTH**

According to the 1990 Census, people of Asian and Pacific Island descent are the fastest growing population group in the United States. Between 1980 and 1990, this group increased nationally by more than 95 percent. In Boston, the Asian and Pacific Islander population — not including “Asian Hispanics” — grew by 95.6 percent, compared to a decline of 11.4 percent for whites, and increases of 12 percent for blacks, 17.6 percent for Native Americans and 71.8 percent for Latinos. In 1980, 74.8 percent of Boston’s Asian American population was foreign born. The corresponding figures for 1990 are not yet available, but should reach at least 70 percent. In 1980, the median income for Boston in general was \$16,212. The median income for Asian Americans in Boston was \$12,136, with wide variation by neighborhoods — \$16,591 in one section of Allston-Brighton, and \$9,059 for central Chinatown.

According to the Census, there were 143,392 Asian and Pacific Islanders in Massachusetts in 1990, approximately 2.4 percent of the total population of the state. This number is more than twice the 1980 figure of 52,615, which was 0.9 percent of the state’s total population. In 1980, there were about 15,150 Asian Americans in Boston, representing 2.69 percent of the population. In 1990, there were approximately 30,000 Asian Americans in Boston, comprising 5.16 percent of the population; and the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that it may have undercounted Asian Americans by as many as 333,000.

In 1980, the five largest Asian nationality groups in Massachusetts were the Chinese, Asian Indians, Koreans, Japanese, and Filipinos, in that order. Together, these five groups comprised 88.7 percent of the total Asian population in the state. In 1990, the five largest national groups, comprising 80 percent of the state’s total Asian population, were, in order, the Chinese, Asian Indians, Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Koreans. The dramatic growth of the total Asian population and the change in the relative numerical standings among the groups reflect the changes in the state’s Asian American community brought about by immigration and Southeast Asian refugee resettlement. The Vietnamese represented the largest number of both new immigrants and refugees to Massachusetts during the 1980s.

These population changes are especially significant when we look at the Southeast Asian community. In 1980, Cambodians in Massachusetts were not even listed in Census publications, being grouped under the “other” Asians category. This “other” group itself comprised only 4.6 percent of the total Asian population. By 1990, Cambodians alone were at least 9.8 percent of the state’s Asian population. Comparing the equivalent 1990 group with 1980, “other” Asians — including the Cambodians — had increased by over 1100 percent. The Vietnamese community also displayed extraordinary population growth, increasing by 543 percent over the decade.

## **THE CHINESE COMMUNITY**

In 1870, a group of 75 Chinese workers came to Massachusetts as laborers contracted to work in Calvin Sampson’s shoe factory in North Adams. They were recruited to break a strike by the factory’s workers, organized under the Secret Order of the Knights of St. Crispin, the largest union in the United States at the time. The Crispins attempted to organize the Chinese, but eventually failed because of language barriers and Sampson’s close watch over his workers (Barth, pp. 198–200).

The desirability of recruiting the Chinese was debated in the newspapers of the time. Some questioned whether their recruitment was merely another form of slavery. Others argued

against recruitment, alleging that Chinese “vices,” including their corrupting influence on white women, were undesirable (Miller, pp. 167–190).

The use of Chinese labor was made more palatable by anti-Irish sentiment which ran rampant during this time. The North Adams strike was led by an organization that included Irish workers as well as “Americans” and French Canadians. In 1875, the *New York Times* suggested that “John” [Chinaman] was, in spite of his vices, a better addition to society than “Paddy” [Irishman] (Miller, p. 180). The Chinese workers remained in North Adams, under the protection and direction of Sampson and Protestant missionaries, who made churchgoers of them.

In the late nineteenth century, racist anti-Chinese violence raged across the Western United States. Murders, lynchings, and assaults drove the Chinese from their jobs in mines, factories, railroads, farming, and fishing — for which they had been recruited. Hoping to outrun the violence, many Chinese workers headed east on the Transcontinental Railroad.

Some of these laborers reached Boston as early as 1875. Chinese workers were contracted to build the “Pearl Street Telephone Exchange” near South Station. They settled in what is now known as Ping On Alley, off of Beach Street, building shacks and pitching tents there (Kiang and Lee, p. 24). Other laborers, who had been brought to Massachusetts to break the North Adams shoe factory strike, drifted to Boston as factory work in North Adams declined.

The 1878 famine in China helped to solidify national fears that the United States would be overrun with Chinese. These fears were supported by memories of the Irish potato famine of the 1840s and the subsequent large-scale immigration of the Irish to America. The *North American Review*, for example, predicted that by 1900, 100 million Chinese would arrive in the United States (Miller, p. 189). This perceived threat, along with the negative image of the Chinese painted by many popular books about China and magazine and newspaper descriptions of Chinese culture on the West Coast, helped solidify opposition to further Chinese immigration.

The domestic depression of the 1870s also provoked increased anti-Chinese sentiment among whites on the West Coast. Many of these nativists had migrated to the West Coast on the Transcontinental Railroad, ironically the product of Chinese labor. The anti-Chinese campaign, supported by labor leaders and business interests at a time of economic depression, led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which effectively stopped any large-scale immigration of Chinese “laborers” to America for the next 85 years. Meanwhile, Chinese laborers in America were driven out of occupations which competed with white labor, and into occupations such as laundries.

Because of anti-miscegenation laws and cultural prohibitions, the primarily young, single Chinese men recruited to work were unable to intermarry or to bring wives from China because of the Exclusion laws. A joke making the rounds of Boston in 1870 went, “Will the Chinese takkee wiffee?” (Miller, p. 185). Nevertheless, by 1890, with a population of 200, predominantly males, Boston’s Chinatown was firmly established. This Chinese bachelor society developed as a closed ethnic community, albeit subject to periodic raids. On October 11, 1903, for example, Boston police surrounded Chinatown and rounded up 250 residents of the community on suspicion of being illegal immigrants. Eventually, only five were deported while everyone else was able to produce documents proving their legal status (Jacobs, et al.). Newspapers described it at the time as “the biggest raid ever executed in the United States” and as a possible model for other cities to use (Kiang, 1986).

As a result of the Exclusion Acts, the Chinese community in Boston remained relatively small, and predominantly male, until the 1970s. The community was kept alive through the few families who were allowed in under the Exclusion law, and by the provision whereby a Chinese already residing in the United States as an American citizen was allowed to bring his child to live with him. This resulted in many Chinese men returning briefly to China to marry



and eventually to return with a child. It also resulted in the subterfuge of the “paper son” or “paper daughter,” whereby a Chinese American would claim a would-be immigrant as his “son” or “daughter” on paper in exchange for payment. In this way, some Chinese were able to overcome the discriminatory exclusion laws and enter the country.

In 1880, the Chinese population in the United States was 105,465. By 1890, the Census year following the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Chinese population had grown modestly to 107,488. According to Census figures for the two decades following the Exclusion Act, the Chinese population declined by almost 20,000 and continued to decline, so that by 1940 it stood at only 77,504.

As elsewhere in the United States, anti-Chinese sentiment made Boston’s Chinatown both a refuge for the Chinese and the center of their economy. Anti-Chinese discrimination restricted the economy of the Chinese community to restaurants and services, such as hand laundries, which no other group was willing to supply.

Throughout this time, community organizations formed, including district and family associations of people who traced their ancestry to the same village or clan in China, and other groups, such as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA). The latter, controlled by merchants — who, along with scholars and diplomats, were still permitted entry under the Exclusion Act — represented Chinatown in its dealings with institutions outside the community. As such, the CCBA was cautious and conservative.

The Second World War was a turning point for Boston’s Chinese community. Many became active in the war effort, going off to fight for the United States, primarily in the Pacific Theater. At the same time, jobs opened up at the Charlestown Navy Yard.

The Chinatown economy began to change rapidly after World War II. For returning servicemen, restaurants became a new source of employment. At the same time, garment shop owners began to pay Chinese women to sew at home, thus initiating a trend in the employment of Asian women in the garment industry that lasted until the 1980s. During the 1980s, the decline of the garment industry in New England resulted in the loss of hundreds of jobs. Even today, however, the main source of employment for immigrant Chinese continues to be the garment and Chinese restaurant industries. These businesses do not require fluency in English, and so are accessible to new immigrants. Yet they are also relatively low-paying, and in the case of the restaurants, involve extra-long hours of work and no benefits.

The War Brides Act, passed at the end of World War II, allowed some Chinese women to immigrate to the United States in the late 1940s. Families were established or reunited, the population expanded, and the South Cove area of Boston became increasingly Chinese.

During the post-war industrial boom in the 1950s, urban renewal and redevelopment began to threaten the existence of Chinatown. In 1959, construction of the Central Artery wiped out hundreds of homes on Albany Street. A few years later, housing along Hudson Street, the most vital thoroughfare of the community, was demolished to make room for the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension. Several hundred families were again left without homes.

In the 1960s, Scollay Square, the historic location of burlesque theaters and adult entertainment in Boston, was demolished to make way for the construction of Government Center. Not long after, city officials, without consulting the Chinatown community, designated Chinatown’s western border along Washington Street as the city’s new adult entertainment district, the “Combat Zone.” At the same time, Tufts-New England Medical Center launched an aggressive plan for institutional expansion, a plan which showed them occupying all of Chinatown within ten years. The city, using its power of eminent domain, ceded valuable community land to the medical center.

In 1965, the Immigration Reform Act amended the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act which had limited the number of Chinese eligible to immigrate to 185 per year, and limited the entire “Asia-Pacific triangle” to 2,000 immigrants a year. The 1965 Act equalized the number of



persons permitted to immigrate to 20,000 per country per year world-wide. This allowed Chinese families, who had been separated for decades by restrictive immigration laws, to reunite, and made way for significant numbers of other immigrants to enter the United States. Chinese immigration increased just as housing in Chinatown was being destroyed. The lack of housing in Chinatown forced many Chinese to settle in other parts of the city, such as Roxbury, Allston-Brighton, and Mission Hill, as well as in neighboring towns connected to Boston by public transportation such as Brookline, Quincy, and Malden.

Until recently, the restaurant and garment industries provided the major sources of employment for immigrant Chinese in Boston. When the garment industry began to decline in the 1980s, hundreds of Chinese American women found themselves with little prospects of re-employment in the industry. Organizing and advocacy by community organizations in the mid-1980s helped develop appropriate retraining programs so that many of these women could find work in other fields such as food services, medical technology, and clerical work. The recent recession, however, has forced many of these women out of work again. The recession has also severely affected the restaurant industry, the primary employer of Chinese American males. Nearly a quarter of the area's Chinese restaurant workers are unemployed as of 1991 (CPA-1), and the community is facing an employment crisis.

Chinatown has been the first stop for many Chinese immigrants. The community offers accessible services and markets, as well as social and cultural affirmation. The physical community, however, no longer has room to expand. The Massachusetts Turnpike and Surface Artery extension not only decreased the size of Chinatown's land area, but also severely limited future expansion. Because of these space limitations and the difficulties associated with the development of low-cost housing, the population of Chinatown has grown by only ten percent over the past decade. Nevertheless, Chinatown continues to receive new residents, not only as old residents move elsewhere, but as families, unable to find affordable housing in Boston's market, begin to double up, moving in with friends or relatives in order to avoid homelessness.

Even after families leave the immediate area, they continue to utilize the businesses and services provided in the community. This connection with the larger Asian American community is recognized in the Chinatown/South Cove Neighborhood Council elections, which are open to any Asian in Massachusetts who is at least 14 years old. For example, the Asian American population in the city of Quincy — mostly Chinese Americans — has grown from less than one percent ten years ago to twelve percent of the city's population in 1989; a major reason for this growth is the Red Line subway, which directly links residents of Quincy with the services of Chinatown. Chinatown is also the transportation and distribution node for dozens of Chinese restaurants in the area, serving as the pick-up point for supplies and restaurant workers who congregate twice a day to catch rides to and from their jobs throughout New England.

Responding to the explosive growth of building downtown in the early 1980s, the Boston Redevelopment Authority initiated a master planning project to manage this growth. Chinatown, located on the edge of downtown Boston, was threatened with being overwhelmed by this development boom. The community was to be surrounded by major development projects, including the so-called "Midtown Cultural District" on its northern border, continued expansion of New England Medical Center on its western border, the depression of the Central Artery on its eastern flank, and modifications to the Massachusetts Turnpike to the south. A Chinatown Master Plan was developed by the Chinatown/South Cove Community Council with extensive community participation, to vitiate the effects of gentrification and increased land speculation, while seeking to strengthen the Chinatown economy and preserve the community's character.

The Midtown Cultural District, consisting primarily of first-class office and retail space and luxury apartments, was to be the primary source of linkage money for an affordable housing development project in the residential section of Chinatown. Initial development efforts in the Midtown Cultural District resulted in the closing of a number of garment factories, Asian stores, and the relocation of a number of Asian families living on the periphery of Chinatown. With the recession, the real estate market collapsed and the major projects which were to establish the district failed to materialize. The linkage money is no longer available, and the affordable housing has yet to materialize.

In 1985, the Boston Redevelopment Authority's Household Surveys estimated the population of Chinatown proper at 5,100. The study also identified Chinatown as the most densely populated neighborhood in the city and the neighborhood with the lowest ratio of parks and open space to population in the city. With more than a century of history, Chinatown continues to grow in population, serving as a social, recreational, cultural, and service center for increasing numbers of Asian Americans and Asian immigrants, including many of the city's Vietnamese and Cambodians.

## THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY

After a nine-year war and a century of colonial control, the French were defeated in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu by a collaboration of Nationalist and Communist Vietnamese forces. In the peace conference in Geneva following the French defeat, Vietnam was split in two at the 17th parallel, the north under the control of Ho Chi Minh and the communists, and the south under Ngo Dinh Diem and the anti-communists. Under the Geneva Accords, Vietnam was to reunite under free elections in July, 1956. In 1955, Premier Diem, supported by the United States, deposed the French-backed emperor Bao Dai, became chief of state, and refused to participate in the 1956 election.

With the defeat of the French, the communists in the north sought to reunify the country under their rule. In 1961, President Kennedy, seeking to contain communism, sent American military advisors to Vietnam, beginning America's direct military involvement in Southeast Asia. By 1966, the United States was involved in a full-scale military action. American forces remained in large numbers until 1973. Two years later, South Vietnam fell to the communists. South Vietnamese officials and those associated with the United States government, as well as businessmen and professionals who feared communist persecution, fled the country. This group constituted the first wave of Vietnamese refugees, who arrived in the United States in 1975.

About 120,000 Vietnamese entered the United States at that time. Only 1,000 or so came to Massachusetts. This group primarily settled in Boston, the South and North Shores, Worcester, and Springfield. Some were government officials, professionals, and businessmen with high levels of education and English skills, which facilitated their adaptation. However, others were undereducated soldiers who came from poor backgrounds and spoke no English. These two distinct groups formed the Vietnamese community in Boston and, as might be expected, conflicts developed. The more educated Vietnamese gradually moved to other locations, such as Washington, D.C., Florida, Texas, and California. The small Vietnamese community left in Boston thus became mostly low-income and non-English speaking (DMH-1).

The large influx of Vietnamese to Massachusetts began in the years 1979–1981. In 1978, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam had stepped up its program to “restructure society,” which included moving people from cities to the country to rebuild an agricultural society,



nationalizing private businesses, putting “undesirables” into “re-education” camps, and discriminating against ethnic Chinese. Thousands of refugees fled to Thailand and escaped by boat to Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Hong Kong. There, after treacherous journeys, they waited in squalid, overcrowded refugee camps until they could be resettled in a third country.

The population of this second wave of refugees was made up of four groups: 1) former government and military officials released from re-education camps; 2) small businessmen of Chinese and Vietnamese descent; 3) fishermen and farmers with little formal education who had access to boats; and 4) youth sent by their parents. This second wave, in general, had less education, more limited English skills, less prior Western or urban contact, and a poorer economic background than the first wave. They had also suffered higher levels of trauma than the first wave of refugees, both in Vietnam and from their escape.

The population of Vietnamese refugees in Massachusetts increased from less than 2,000 to almost 10,000 between 1979 and 1981 (DMH-1). The 1990 Census placed the Vietnamese population at 15,449 persons in Massachusetts and 4,754 persons in Boston.

Under the Orderly Departure Program, an increasing number of Vietnamese have also immigrated to the United States seeking to reunite with their families. Since the passage of the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) in 1982, and the Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1988, it has become easier for Vietnamese Amerasian children to enter the United States as immigrants eligible for refugee benefits. In 1982–1987, ODP brought about 3,800 Amerasian children to the United States. The Amerasian Homecoming Act admitted about 8,700 Amerasians, of which 323 came to Massachusetts in 1989, especially to Boston and Springfield, which were considered “cluster sites” for Amerasian resettlement (HHS-1).

Since 1989, many long-term political detainees, released from Vietnamese reeducation camps after more than ten years, have also been admitted. Boston has served as a major resettlement site for these political detainees, who now confront especially serious issues of readjustment and reintegration into a new society.

Vietnamese in Massachusetts are concentrated in the Dorchester and Allston-Brighton neighborhoods of Boston, and in the towns of Lawrence, Chelsea, Malden, Salem, Amherst, Springfield, Worcester, and Quincy. Over one-quarter of them are secondary migrants, coming mostly from California, New York, Texas, Kansas, and Louisiana. In Dorchester, a number of Vietnamese stores and businesses have been established around the Fields Corner subway stop; several more are located on Dorchester Avenue.

Chinese Vietnamese refugees are predominantly urban, from merchant backgrounds, and with moderate levels of education and contact with the West. According to the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants, about 2.5 percent of the Vietnamese in Massachusetts are of Chinese descent, but these numbers are difficult to estimate because some Chinese Vietnamese have chosen to remain in the Vietnamese American community, while others have joined the Chinese American community. Some workers in the Chinese American community believe that the proportion of Vietnamese who are ethnic Chinese is considerably higher than the reported 2.5 percent. The Department of Mental Health’s profile and needs assessment found that Vietnamese of Chinese heritage comprised 9.27 percent of their sample (DMH-1, p. 14).

A 1985 study of Chinatown businesses indicated that over half were owned by Chinese Vietnamese merchants (BRA-5). Unlike other Southeast Asian refugees, they have been able to establish shops, markets, and restaurants in Chinatown, utilizing their knowledge of the Chinese language and culture, along with their economic skills and pre-migration business networks.

The Chinese Vietnamese are grouped in this section under the Vietnamese heading, based on their country of origin and their refugee status. Socioeconomically and culturally,



however, they could just as rationally be included under the Chinese heading. Because of their entrepreneurial skills and their multilingual, multicultural backgrounds, they represent an important resource and bridge between the Chinese and Vietnamese communities. The same is true for ethnic Chinese from Cambodia who link the Chinese and Cambodian communities in Boston.

## THE CAMBODIAN COMMUNITY

After nearly a century of foreign domination, Cambodia declared its independence from France in 1953. Prince Sihanouk, who had hoped to take a neutral stance towards matters in Vietnam, cut off contact with the United States and formed ties with communist forces. The United States then began a six-year massive bombing and defoliation campaign in Cambodia. In 1970, General Lon Nol, supported by the United States, seized power. The main opposing force (besides Sihanouk) was the communist Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, who, in 1975, overthrew Lon Nol and launched “Year Zero” of a new society.

Some Cambodians who worked for the American-backed government were able to leave the country and come to the United States at this time. In 1975, about 5,571 Cambodians entered the United States; of those 54 came to Massachusetts. Most Cambodians from this first wave of refugees settled in California, Utah, Oregon, and Maryland.

With the fall of Lon Nol began one of the most ruthless and violent regimes in history as the Khmer Rouge attempted to reconstruct the country into an agricultural society free of Western influences. The government’s policy included forcing the urban population to relocate at gunpoint to the countryside to become farmers, and killing all Cambodians with a non-peasant background, including intellectuals, professionals, and those associated with the American-supported government of Lon Nol. As a result of mass executions and deaths from disease and starvation, it is estimated that out of a population of seven million, between one and three million Cambodians died under Khmer Rouge rule.

In 1979, Vietnam invaded Cambodia and took control of the country, forcing the Khmer Rouge into the mountains and jungles. As the fighting continued into 1980, very little of the rice crop was planted, resulting in famine. Vietnam’s invasion triggered an exodus of refugees, as about half a million people fled through the jungle, across minefields, to Thailand. These second-wave refugees were less educated and had had less exposure to Western culture than the first wave. Their experiences of severe and prolonged trauma under the Khmer Rouge also distinguish them from the first wave and from other Southeast Asian refugees. Thousands of Cambodians continue to languish in Thai refugee camps, waiting for peace, with little hope of resettlement in a third country.

Cambodians began coming to Massachusetts in small numbers in 1980–1981. The spring of 1981 marked the beginning of the large influx of Cambodian refugees to Massachusetts, resulting both from resettlement and individual secondary migration. Massachusetts became the second-most preferred state in the nation for Cambodian resettlement, due to the availability of jobs in the state’s booming economy, the presence of a local Cambodian Buddhist temple, and the provision of supportive services by the state.

Cambodians in Massachusetts are concentrated in East Boston, Lynn, Lowell, Chelsea, and Revere, with lesser numbers in Western Massachusetts towns. By the end of 1989, the Office of Refugees and Immigrants (MORI) counted 5,362 Cambodians in Boston, and 18,335 in Massachusetts, with most of these living in Lowell. Lowell represents the second largest Cambodian community in the United States, after Long Beach, California. Although the 1990 Census counted 15,971 Asian and Pacific Americans in Lowell, community leaders

have estimated the number may be as high as 25,000. With the current recession, however, Cambodian community leaders have also observed a growing out-migration from Lowell. Cambodians comprise 46 percent of all Southeast Asian refugees in Massachusetts.

*Asian Americans  
and Poverty*



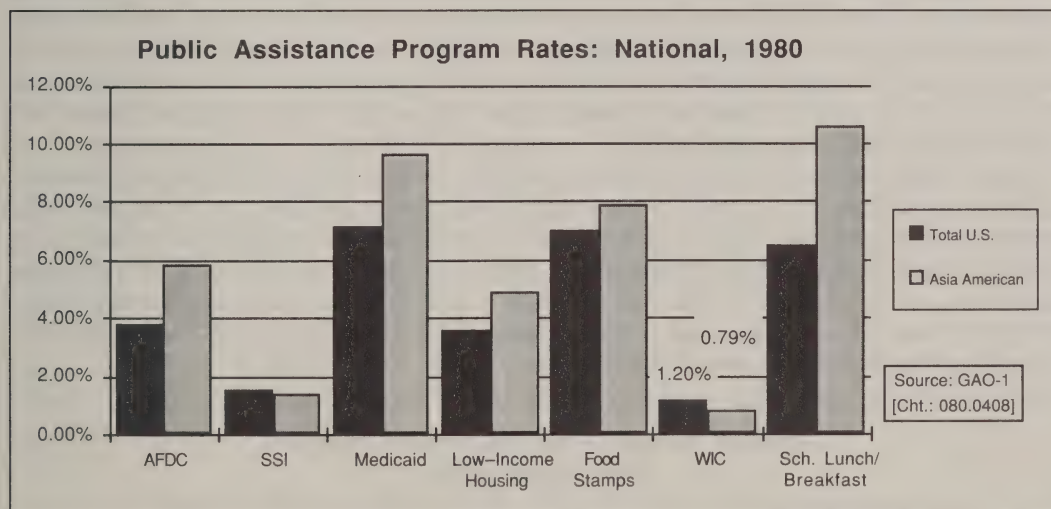


# *Asian Americans and Poverty*

According to a 1990 report by the General Accounting Office (GAO-1), Asian Americans in 1985 participated nationally in public assistance programs at about the same rate as the rest of the population. The differences, with the exception of the School Lunch and Breakfast program, were not statistically significant. The report did not give a breakdown of the particular ethnic groups receiving public assistance, nor did it specify if their participation was part of a targeted refugee resettlement program or whether a particular group was receiving the kind of assistance to which all Americans are entitled.

In addition, the report notes that, according to 1980 Census data analyzed by the Social Security Administration, Asian Americans 65 and over “participated in SSI to a greater extent than their U.S. counterparts. Almost 19 percent of Asian Americans aged 65 or over received SSI benefits, compared with 9 percent of the U.S. elderly” (GAO-1, pp. 40–41).

The report notes that, proportionately, “newly arrived Southeast Asian refugees are much more likely to receive assistance than Asian Americans overall, in part because of special programs established to help refugees” (GAO-1, p. 41). States are reimbursed 100 percent by the Federal government for welfare costs under these programs. In 1987, according to the report, “Southeast Asian refugees had higher rates of participation in these aid programs than most other refugee groups for whom data were available” (GAO-1, p. 41). Only refugees without adult children to support them are currently eligible for such programs, however, and only for eight months. This was reduced from three years during the past decade.



The change in benefits eligibility from three years to eight months was incremental. In 1980, refugees were eligible for federal support for three years while they adjusted to their new country and learned the expectations and skills necessary to become self-supporting in America. In 1982, the duration of the period of support was cut in half to 18 months for

refugees without children. A few years later, the duration of Federal support for refugees with children was cut from three years to 31 months, and then cut again to 24 months. In 1987, support for refugees without children was reduced from 18 to 12 months; and in 1988, the Federal government cut its support of refugees with children from 24 months to four months. This group of refugees, because it consisted of families with dependent children, was supposedly eligible for welfare programs such as AFDC.

By cutting the benefit period, the Federal government shifted responsibility for support of refugee families onto the states. If the family needed help beyond four months, the state would have to assume responsibility for their support. As of October, 1991, Federal support for refugees without children was cut from 12 months to eight months, and all support for refugee families with children is assumed by the state.

The Federal government's shifting responsibility for support of refugees onto the states has created problems for Massachusetts because the state must budget for refugee welfare support without knowing exactly how many refugees will be arriving in the Commonwealth. While Massachusetts must set its budget by July — including that portion of its budget to support refugees — the Federal government does not complete its budget until October, and so the state does not know how much federal support it will receive. State budget requests for refugee support, if too low, will mean that aid for refugees will run out before the end of the fiscal year. If the request is too high, there could be a public backlash against refugees, accusing them of taking too much money and raising the tax burden. The mere fact that refugees must depend on public support has already been used in Massachusetts by some politicians to create animosity toward refugees.

While the number of Cambodians arriving in this country has fallen sharply, Vietnamese, primarily former political prisoners and Amerasians — children of American service men and Vietnamese mothers — continue to arrive in Massachusetts in relatively large numbers. Eighty-five percent of former Vietnamese political prisoners receive benefits. Many of them suffer from parasitic infections and poor health, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder from war, loss of family, and political imprisonment — which may show up two to three years after resettlement. Many of the Amerasians have little education, and may even be illiterate in Vietnamese. Few members of these groups are likely to have a prior work history which they can document. This leaves them in a situation where, regardless of their health or lack of skills, they must adjust to this country within eight months, after which they find themselves without any kind of government support.

Most refugees do require public support when they first arrive in the United States. Unlike immigrants, they have no mandated guarantors to assist them, and have arrived in more dire straits than the typical immigrant. The fact that refugees initially require public assistance has apparently helped some politicians to depict the refugee community as welfare-dependent. A 1989 study of the refugee population in Lowell, however, contradicts this stereotype. The study found that the refugee community, in fact, was slightly less welfare-dependent than was the community as a whole.

**Number of Asians receiving SSI and Medicaid  
Boston, June 1991:**

SSI/Over 65 .....	88
SSI/Disabled .....	20
Medicaid/Over 65 .....	119
Medicaid/AFDC .....	510
Medicaid/Disabled .....	32
Medicaid/Under 21 .....	677



In June, 1991, Asian Americans were still participating in public welfare benefits at about the same rate as their proportion in the population. However, this average figure fails to reveal significant differences among Asian American ethnic groups. The 1989 DMH study found that, among the 453 Vietnamese it surveyed, “235 or over one-half (51.76%) are on welfare assistance” (DMH-1, p. 27). Information provided by the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants also suggests that about half of the Cambodian population is receiving welfare benefits.

According to the GAO, over 60 percent of Cambodians and nearly 60 percent of Vietnamese were participating in “selected U.S. public assistance programs” in 1987, including Refugee Cash Assistance, Refugee Medical Assistance, AFDC, SSI, Medicaid and General Assistance programs. The report notes, however, that these figures only covered refugees “who were in the United States for 31 months or less” (GAO-1, p. 42, note). Since the figures cover those people who are offered these services when they enter the United States, the figures are as suggestive of the rate at which refugees *get off* public assistance as they are about the proportion of people who must still depend on those services.

Several Boston neighborhoods also appear to have significant populations of Asian Americans in public housing. Asian Americans make up 5.9 percent of Boston Housing Authority households in Charlestown, though comprising only 2.2 percent of the neighborhood’s population. According to August, 1991, BHA figures, 238 Asian Americans resided in BHA housing. The 1990 Census counted 320 Asian Americans in Charlestown. In other words, 74.4 percent of all Asian Americans living in Charlestown live in public housing. In East Boston, Asian Americans comprise 3.8 percent of the total population. Asians are 8.8 percent of BHA households, or 302 persons, which is 24.1 percent of all Asians in East Boston. In South Boston, Asian Americans were 1.8 percent of the total population and 3.7 percent of BHA households (total: 378 persons). And a remarkable 71.5 percent of all Asian Americans in South Boston live in public housing.

The one factor most relevant to the question of persistent poverty in Boston’s Asian American community is that of immigration. In 1980, the great majority of Asians in Boston, 74.8 percent, were foreign born. The figures for 1990 are not yet available, but a very rough projection of population growth — assuming an average of 7,234 immigrants and refugees per year between 1981 and 1990, and ignoring births, deaths, and secondary migration — suggests that the number of foreign-born Asians in the state equals about 70 percent. This may be a relatively conservative figure for Boston — given the city’s role as a traditional first stop for many immigrants and the apparent undercount of Cambodians and Vietnamese — but it corresponds to the current national figure. The fact that at least two-thirds of the current Asian population are immigrants means that the concept of “poverty in America which persists across generations” cannot yet apply to most Asian Americans, no matter what their economic status.

Poverty itself, however, is a fact of life for many Asian Americans. And the available data indicate that there is some relationship, at least in Boston, between poverty and immigrant status. This can be attributed to a number of factors, including English-language ability and education.



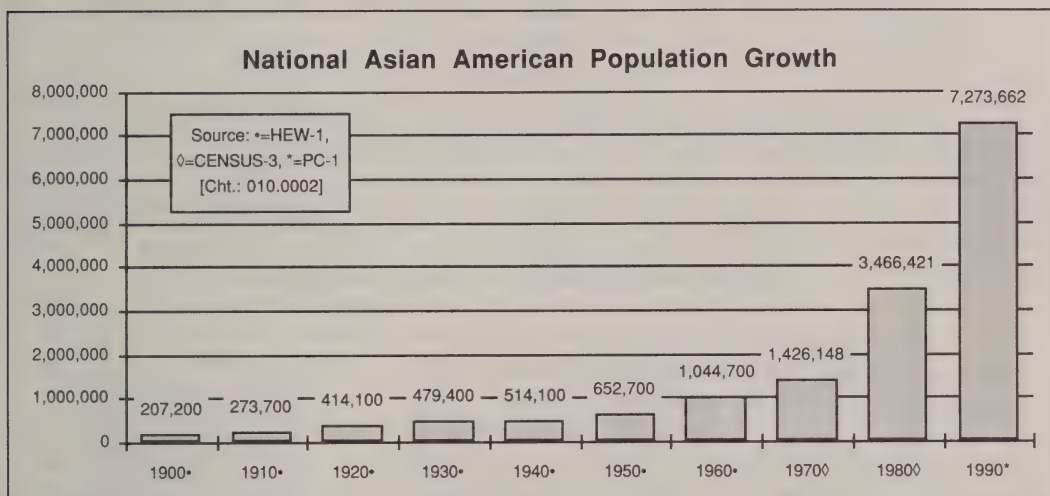
# *Asian American Demographics*



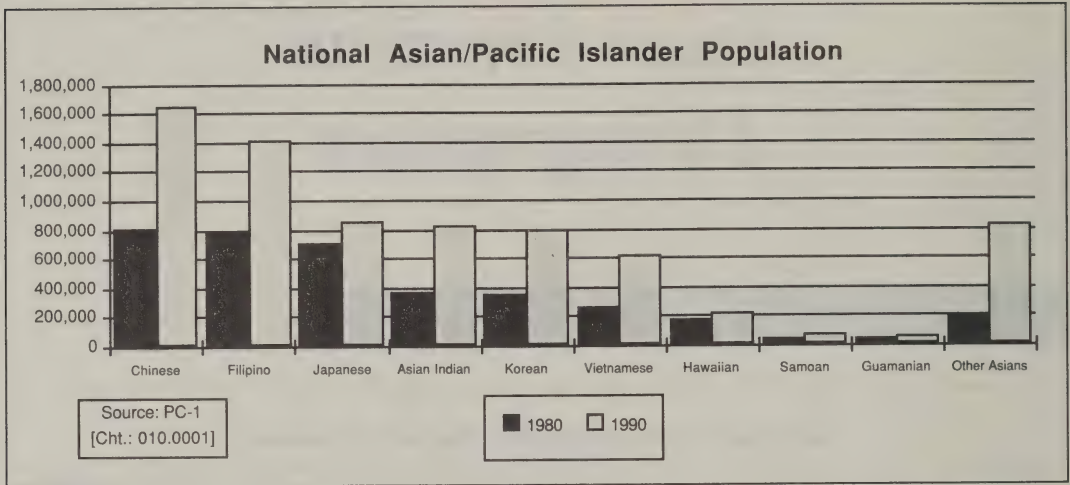


# Asian American Demographics

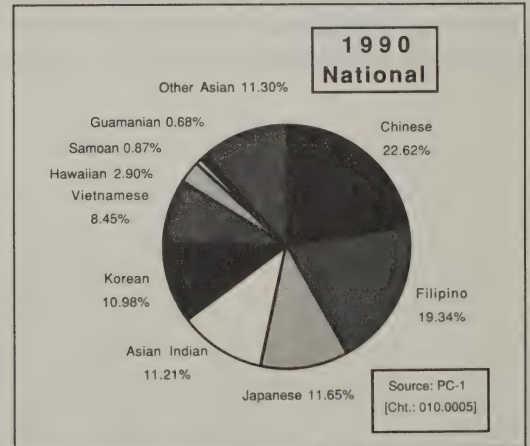
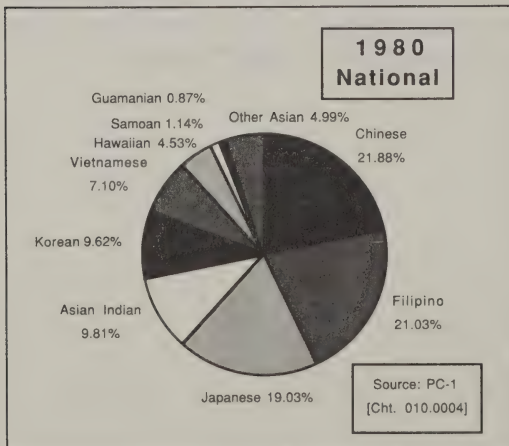
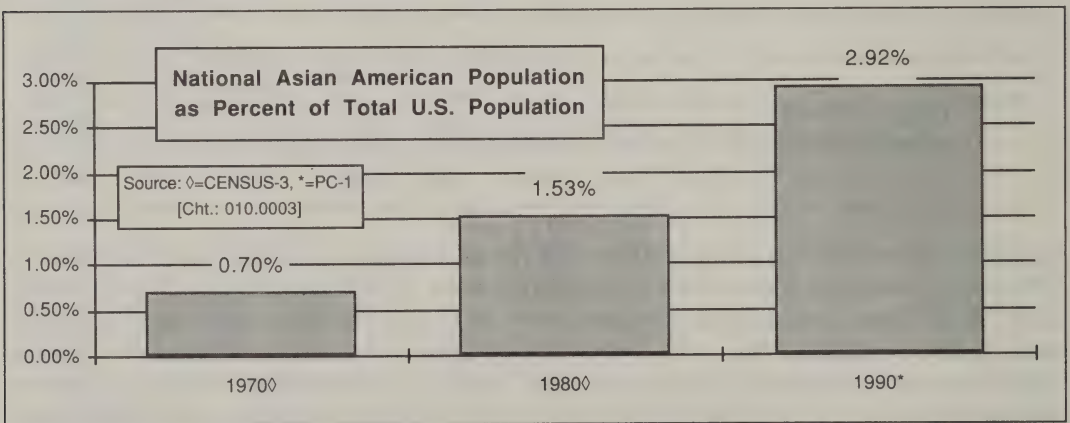
## NATIONAL AND MASSACHUSETTS STATISTICS



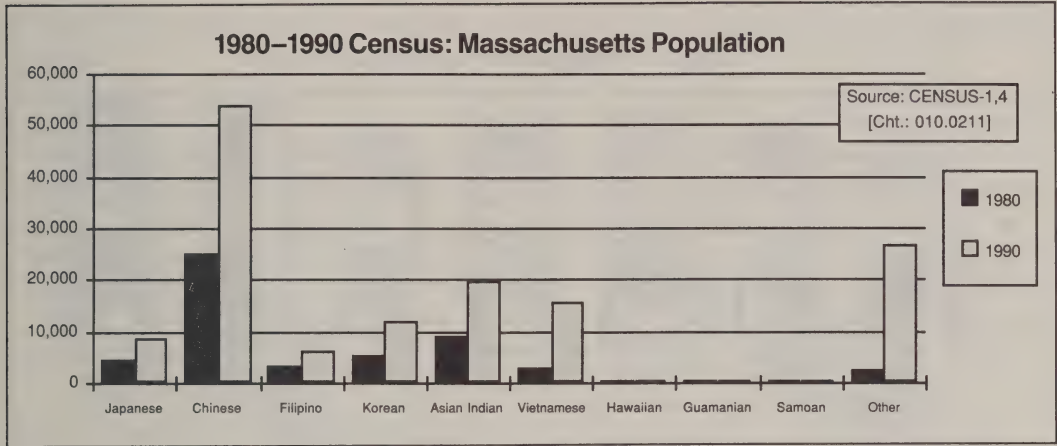
As a result of restrictive immigration laws, the Asian American population grew slowly until 1965, when immigration quotas were amended to allow 20,000 people per year per country, up to 170,000 from the Pacific hemisphere, into the United States, on a non-discriminatory basis. A seven-category “preference” system gave priority to relatives of American citizens and immigrants with needed talents and skills. In 1978, an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act did away with hemispheric quotas, imposing instead a worldwide quota of 290,000 persons per year. In 1980, the Refugee Act further revised the immigrant quota system and established a separate worldwide ceiling for refugees to the United States, and reduced the worldwide ceiling on the remaining six categories to 270,000 persons.



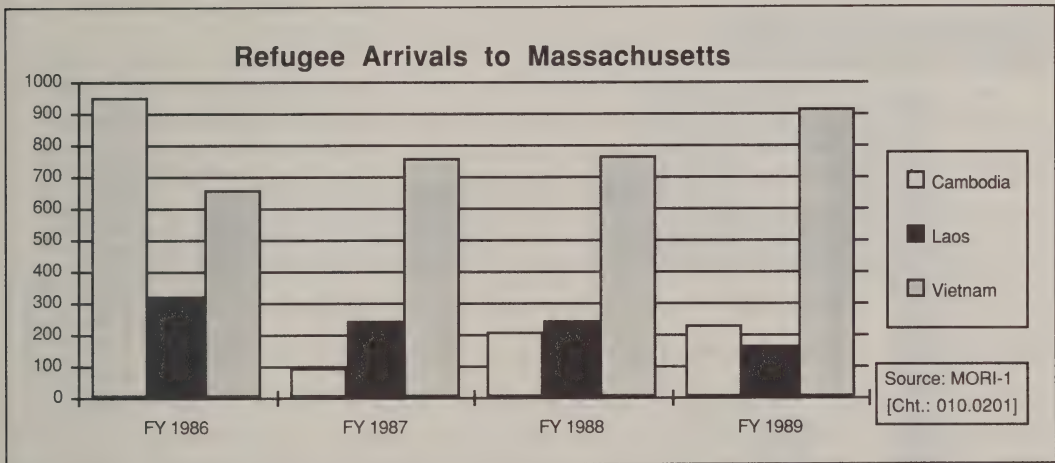
As a result of these reforms of American immigrant and refugee policy, the population of many Asian groups in the United States has increased dramatically. Many Chinese families have been reunited successfully after many years of separation. The aftermath of the Vietnam War created a large group of Southeast Asian refugees who began arriving in 1975; their numbers both for resettlement and immigration swelled considerably after 1980.







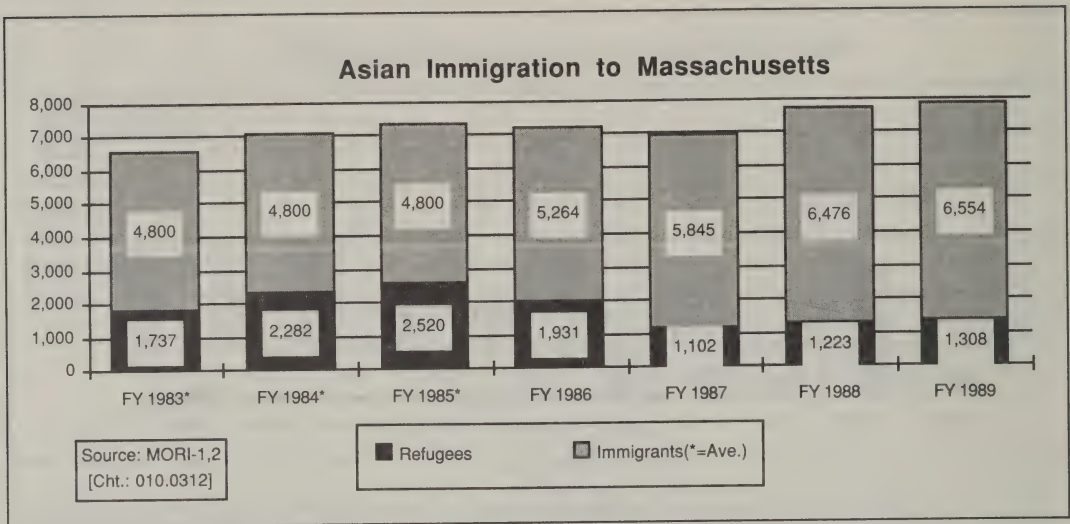
The Asian American population in Massachusetts showed growth similar to the national Asian American population, the difference being in the proportions of each national sub-group.



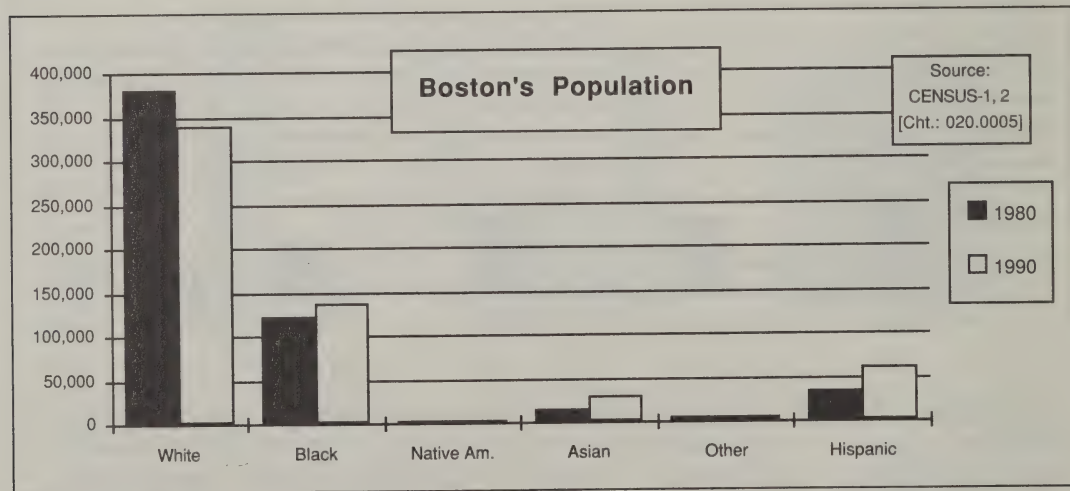
According to the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants, a “refugee” is defined as “a person who is outside his or her own country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to return or avail himself or herself of the protection of that country because of persecution or well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (MORI-1, p. 2).

An “immigrant” is “a person admitted to the United States as an actual or prospective resident who has the right to eventually obtain citizenship” (MORI-1, p. 2). While this definition does not explicitly exclude refugees, MORI makes a distinction because people who enter the United States as refugees are eligible for special programs available only to refugees. This report will follow the convention of treating immigrants and refugees as distinct categories.

The numbers of new refugees in Massachusetts directly resettled from Asia declined after 1985 due to the decrease in the number of Cambodians resettled here. These figures do not include non-refugees or trends in secondary migration to Massachusetts from other states in the United States.

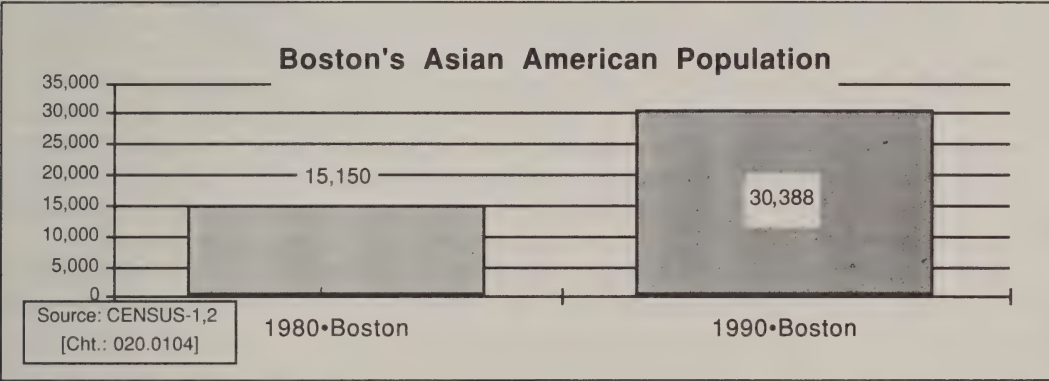
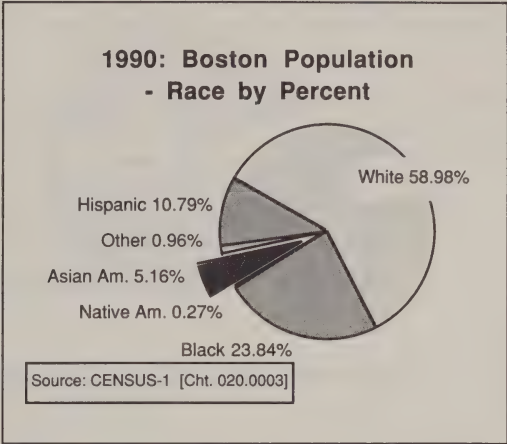
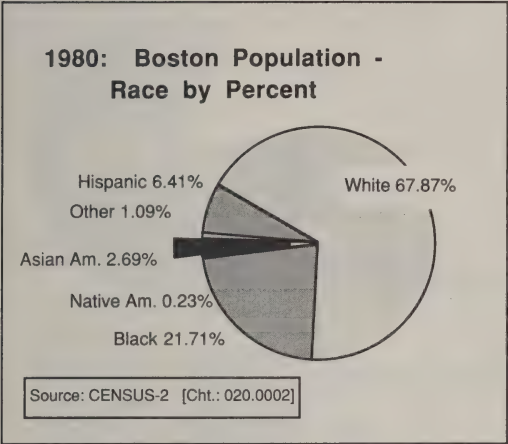


## BOSTON STATISTICS



Between 1980 and 1990, according to the United States Census, Boston's population increased by about 11,300 people. Within this increase were shifts in the racial composition of the city. All racial groups except whites and "others" grew in size. The two largest increases were experienced by Latinos and Asian Americans. In fact, Asian Americans increased in absolute numbers almost as much as blacks, who make up a much larger percentage of the total population.

In 1980, whites comprised 67.87 percent of Boston's population. By 1990, whites in Boston had decreased to 58.98 percent of the population, reflecting a decrease of almost 43,400 persons.



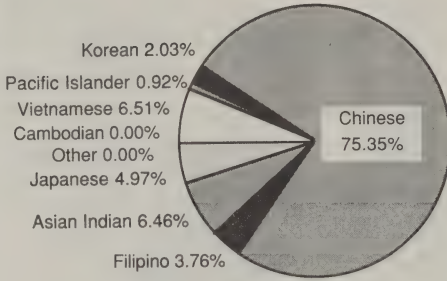
During this same period, Boston's Asian American community grew by 96 percent. Within the Asian American community there were also significant changes in the relative proportion of the population occupied by each ethnic group. Chinese Americans remained the largest group, with 75.35 percent of the Asian American population in 1980, and 54.96 percent in 1990. This change in the share of the population does not reflect a decrease in the Chinese American population, which actually increased by over 5,000 persons. Rather, it is indicative of the growing Southeast Asian population.

Cambodians in Boston, not listed separately in the 1980 Census, in 1990 comprised about 1,000 individuals, making up 3.3 percent of the Asian population. However, this figure is questioned by workers in the Cambodian community as being low. The Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants (MORI) has estimated the Boston Cambodian community to be as many as 5,000.

Boston's Vietnamese community also grew dramatically. In 1980, the Census counted 987 Vietnamese in Boston. By 1990, this group had grown by about 482 percent to 4,754, comprising 15.64 percent of Boston's Asian population.

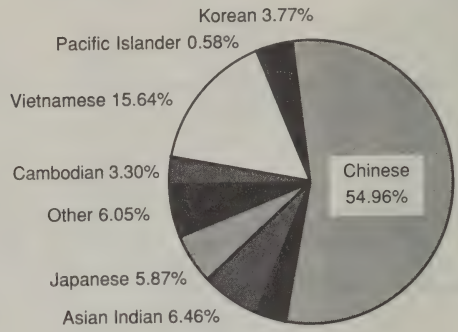


**Boston, 1980: Asian Americans**



Source: CENSUS-2 [Cht.: 020.0101]

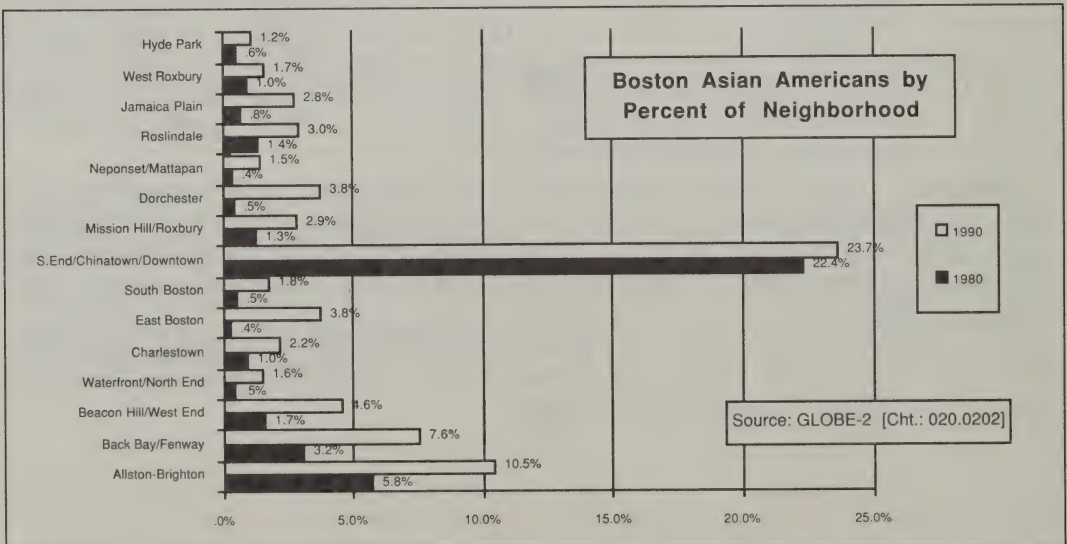
**Boston, 1990: Asian Americans**



Source: CENSUS-1 [Cht.: 020.0102-98]

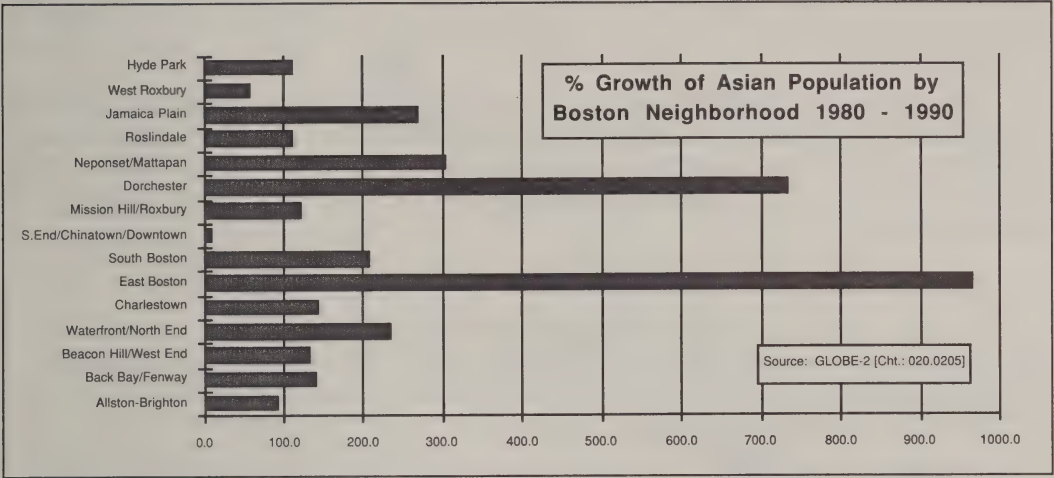
Because of the relatively small size of the Asian American population, specific neighborhoods other than Chinatown in which “poor” Asian Americans have lived over a period of time cannot be identified. Asian Americans were only about 2.7 percent of Boston’s population in 1980. The Census lists only eight census tracts, out of 163, containing 400 or more Asians and Pacific Islanders. Asians comprised more than half the population in only two of those. Tract 702 in Chinatown, for example, was 75.0 percent Asian. Tracts 701, 702, 704, and 705, containing between 25 percent and 75 percent Asians, are contiguous, extending from Chinatown to the South End. The four remaining tracts were each less than ten percent Asian American.

The Asian population in all of Boston’s neighborhoods experienced considerable growth. The chart below shows the number of Asians as a percentage of the neighborhood’s population. Ten of the fourteen neighborhoods experienced an increase in their total populations, while the remaining four, Beacon Hill/West End, South Boston, Roslindale, and West Roxbury, experienced population declines of between thirty-three persons in Roslindale to 2,100 persons in Beacon Hill/West End.



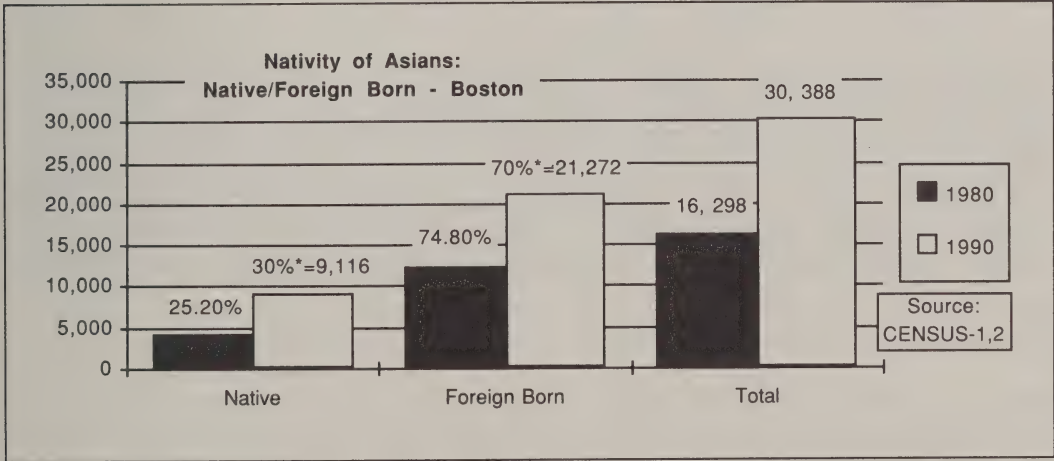
Source: GLOBE-2 [Cht.: 020.0202]

The following chart illustrates the growth of Asian populations in Boston's neighborhoods. The smallest percentage increase occurred in the neighborhood with the largest Asian population, South End/Chinatown/Downtown: 10.6 percent growth, or 1,303 persons. The two neighborhoods which experienced the largest proportionate growth were Dorchester and East Boston, whose Asian populations grew by 734.3 percent and 967.8 percent respectively, or by 2,326 and 722 persons.



In 1980, the proportion of Asian Americans in Boston who were foreign born was approximately 74.8 percent. No figures are yet available for the corresponding proportion of foreign-born Asians in Boston for 1990.

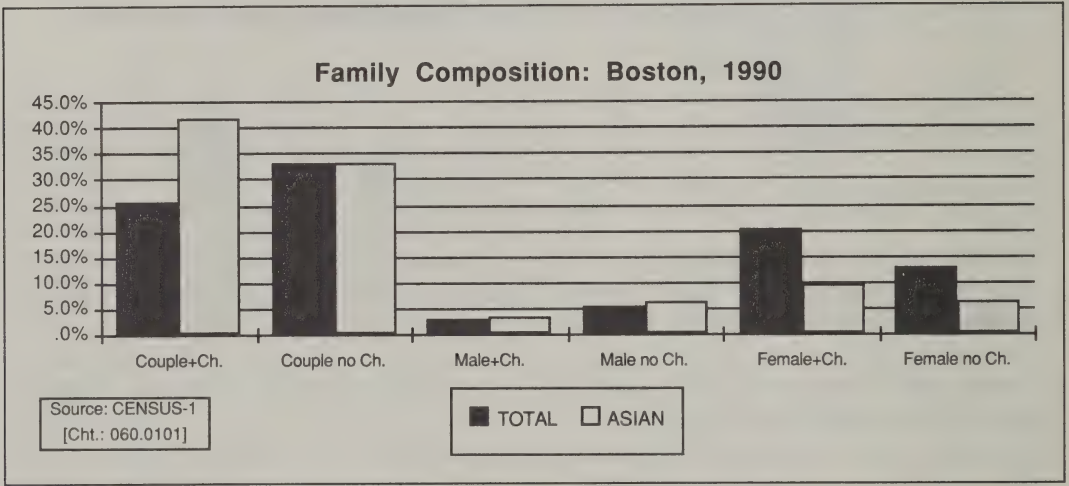
Estimating that the number of foreign born Asian Americans is approximately the same as the 1990 national proportion of 70 percent, the number of foreign-born Asians in Boston in 1990 would be approximately 21,272.



## FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS

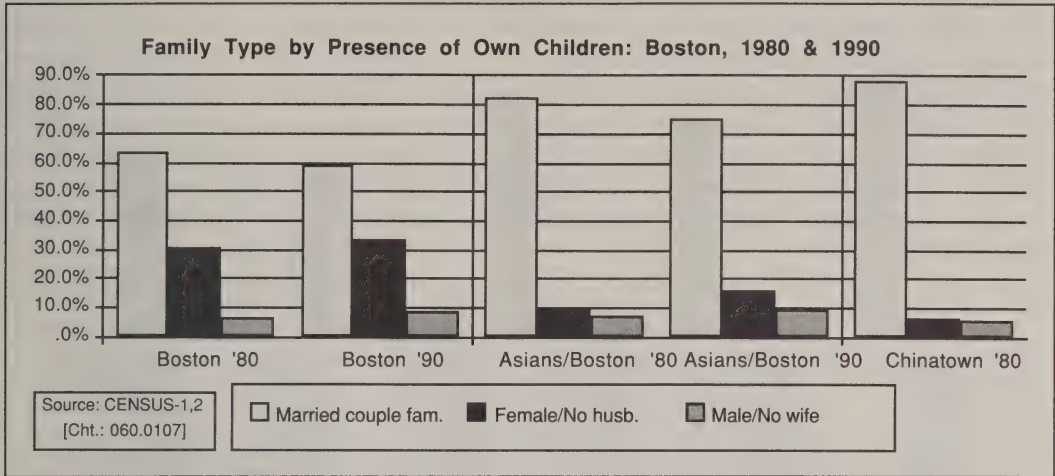
Conventional wisdom, which appears to be borne out by the data, assumes that “family” is important for Asian Americans. Using Census data and definitions, a “family” consists of a “householder and one or more other persons living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. All persons in a household who are related to the householder are regarded as members of his or her family.” A family, therefore, includes the extended family.

A “householder” is the “person or one of the persons in whose name the home is owned or rented.” There are two types of householders identified by the Census. A “family householder” is a householder “living with one or more persons related to him or her by birth, marriage, or adoption.” A “nonfamily householder” is a householder “living alone or with nonrelatives only.”



In 1990, Asian American families in Boston were overwhelmingly “traditional,” consisting of either a couple with a child or children, or a couple without children. Such families comprised 75 percent of Asian American families, compared to 58.6 percent for the city as a whole. There are proportionately more than twice as many female-headed families in Boston as a whole than there are in the Asian American community. There are proportionately slightly more single male households with and without children in the Asian American community, 3.2 percent and 6.2 percent, than in Boston as a whole, 2.8 percent and 5.5 percent.





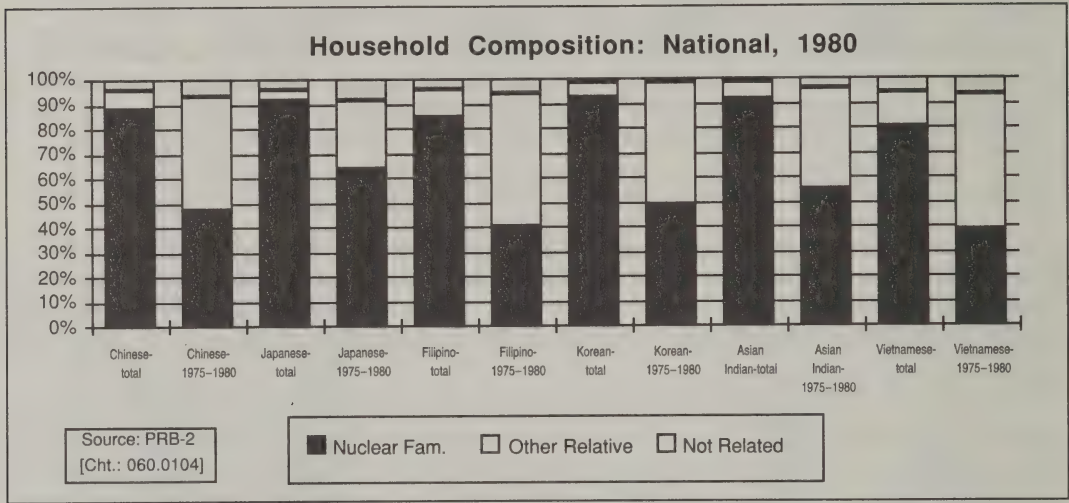
In 1980, 88.1 percent of families in Chinatown were married couples, and the proportion of all Asian households in Boston composed of a married couple family was 82.7 percent, while the rate for all of Boston was 63 percent. In 1990, the proportion of families composed of couples declined for both all Asians and for Boston in general: to 75 percent for Asians and 58.6 percent for “all Boston.”

The proportion of families headed by a woman with no husband present increased over the decade. This was the case for both Boston in general and for Asian Americans in Boston. In 1980, female-headed families made up 30.4 percent of all Boston families and 10.3 percent of Asian families. By 1990, female-headed families were 33.1 percent of all Boston families and 15.6 percent of Asian American families.

It is not clear why this relatively large increase in female-headed families in the Asian American community has occurred. One reason may be that many Cambodian women who arrived in the 1980s are widows. Another factor mentioned by interview sources is that there are an increasing number of divorces in the Cambodian and Vietnamese communities, precipitated by changing family roles, economic difficulties, and their attendant conflicts. Both Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees come from societies where the husband heads the household, while the wife and children assume subordinate positions. This male breadwinner role and its consequent economic authority has been compromised by the financial need for multiple wage-earners within the family. Refugee women have entered the American work force in order to contribute to the family income, sometimes more successfully than their husbands. Children experience a change in their role, too, because, like children of other newcomers, they learn the new culture and language before their parents, thereby serving as interpreters and gatekeepers of the new culture. These factors, combined with the American ethos of independence and equality, restructure the family system and seriously undermine the male's traditional role.

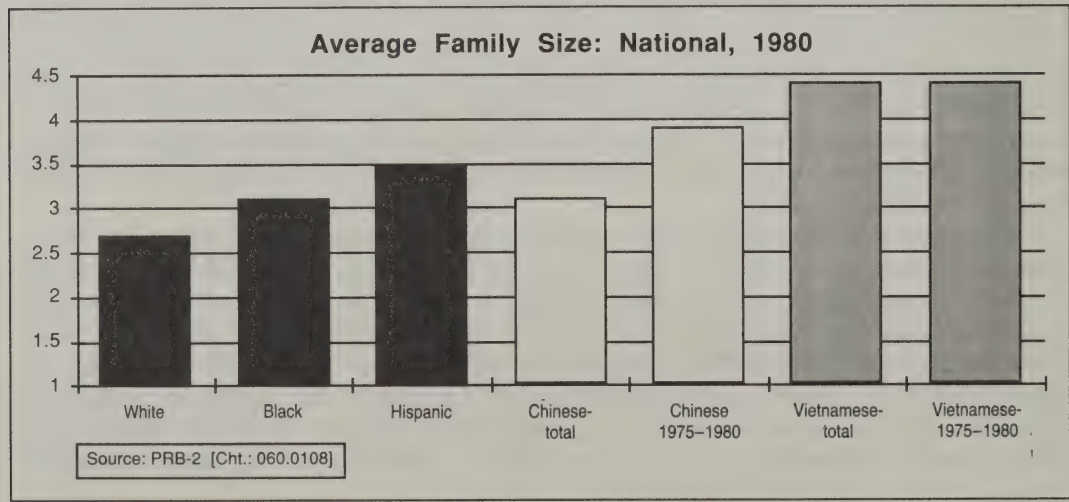
Cambodian interviewees also report an increasing prevalence of spouse abuse. The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health studies on Asian refugees report that psychological problems, culture shock, and post-traumatic stress disorder are significant problems in the lives of refugees. Such conditions may indeed be contributing to an increasing level of both abuse and divorce. The 1986 DMH study of the Vietnamese community does not necessarily support this thesis, however, indicating that only 1.7 percent of that sample is “separated.” The 1980 rate for Asian Americans in Boston divorced or separated was 3.2 percent for males and 3.3 percent for females. For Chinatown, it was 1.7 percent and 1.4 percent respectively.

The proportion of male-headed families without wives also increased both for Boston in general and in the Asian American community: from 6.6 percent to 8.3 percent for Boston, and from 7 percent to 9.5 percent in the Asian American community. One possible source of the increased numbers lies with the Vietnamese community, which is disproportionately male. However, some of this proportion may include married men whose wives are still in Vietnam or in refugee camps. Thus, while they may technically constitute single-parent households, this may not be their own choice. According to the 1986 DMH study of the Vietnamese community, 6.7 percent of males and 1.3 percent of females still had spouses in Vietnam (DMH-1).



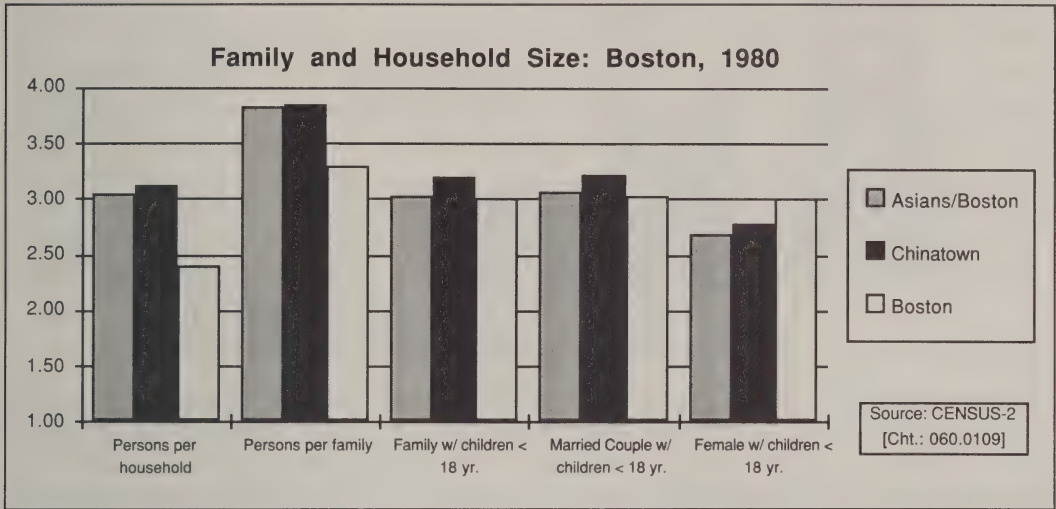
The extended family is a significant part of the immigrant family structure. The 1980 Population Reference Bureau report (PRB-2) shows that the household composition of Asian groups who immigrated between 1975 and 1980 includes large proportions of “other relatives.” The report indicates that the “household patterns of recent immigrants in the different Asian ethnic groups reflect both cultural preferences and the strategies they adopt to make the economic adjustment to life in the United States” (PRB-2, p. 22).

Nationally, in 1980, 28 percent of recent Chinese immigrant families included other relatives. Fifty-five percent of recent Vietnamese families included other relatives.





The Population Reference Bureau report continues that it “is likely that these ‘other relatives,’ members of the householder’s extended family, provide additional workers to help boost family income or cushion the loss of income if a family worker loses a job, as well as make it possible to share child care and the cost of rents or mortgages” (PRB-2, pp. 22–23).



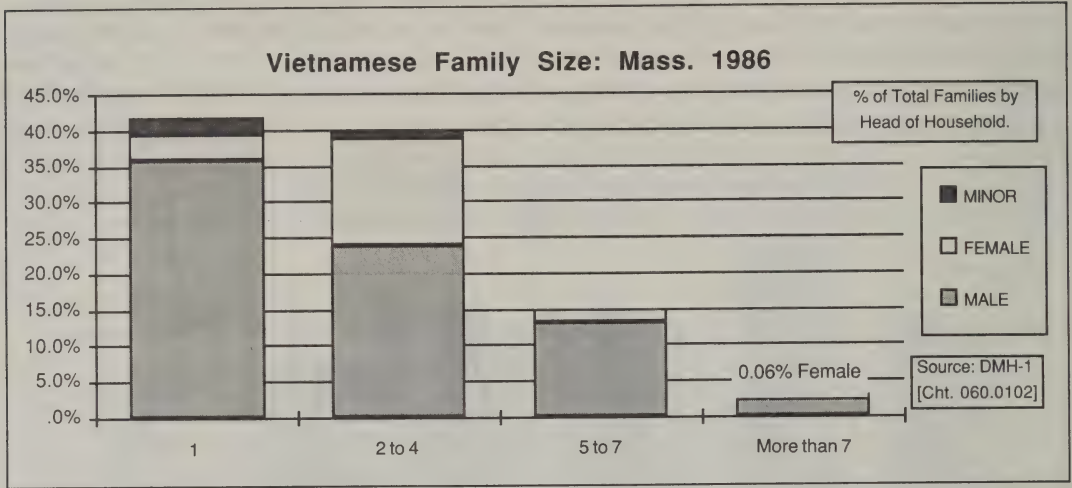
The average size of Asian American families in 1980 was about the same as the national sample of Chinese people who immigrated between 1975 and 1980: 3.9 persons for recent immigrants, and 3.83 and 3.85 persons for Boston and Chinatown Asians respectively. It makes sense that the Boston sample should follow the national sample, since Chinese Americans comprised over 75 percent of Boston’s Asian American community in 1980. For Boston in general, the average number of persons in a family is 3.3.

The average family size for Asians in Boston, and for Boston in general, for families with young children and families composed of a married couple with a young child or children, were about the same: 3.02 for Asian families and 3.01 for all Boston, and 3.06 and 3.03 for couples with children. The size of Chinatown families in both cases was slightly higher, with 3.19 persons in families with young children and 3.21 persons in married couple families.

The average size of female-headed families with minor children is slightly smaller in the Asian population in Boston and in Chinatown than for Boston in general. Asian female-headed families have on the average 2.69 persons in Boston and 2.77 persons in Chinatown. For Boston in general, the average size of female-headed families is three persons.

In general, however, households, including both families and households of unrelated individuals, are somewhat larger for the Asian American community than for other groups. The average number of persons in Boston’s Asian American households is 3.04 overall, 3.12 in Chinatown. The average number of persons per household for Boston in general is 2.4. Part of the difference between Asian American households and other Boston households can be accounted for by the fact that fewer Asian Americans live alone than do persons in Boston generally: 8.5 percent for Asians in Boston, and 8.1 percent for Chinatown as opposed to 15.3 percent for all of Boston.



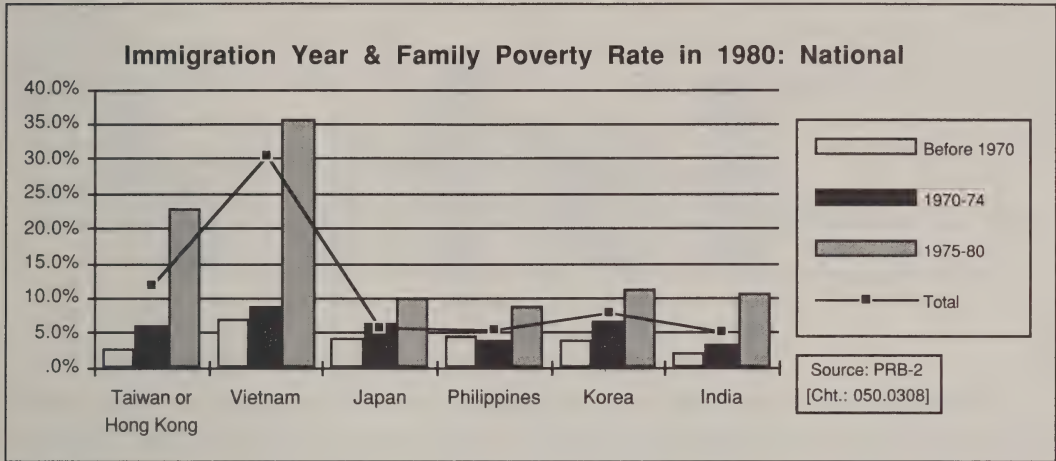


The national figure for the size of Vietnamese families in 1980 is 4.4 persons. The 1986 DMH sample of Vietnamese in Massachusetts does not distinguish “families” from “households.” Of this sample, 57 percent of Vietnamese “families” consisted of two or more persons; 15 percent of families had between five and seven persons, and 3 percent of families had more than seven persons.

Vietnamese females in Massachusetts head 15 percent of families with between two and four persons, 1.8 percent of families with five to seven persons, and .06 percent of families with more than seven persons. (This last figure consists of one person in the sample.) In other words, almost 17 percent of Vietnamese families in 1986 were headed by a woman.

Individuals living alone constituted 41.9 percent of Vietnamese “households.” Of this number, 35.9 percent were males, 3.6 percent were females, and 2.4 percent were “minors.” “Minors” also headed 1.2 percent of families with between two and four individuals. The large number of Vietnamese males living alone is the result of the greater proportion of males in the Vietnamese community. As was noted earlier, a larger number of males escaped Vietnam than did females. It is not clear whether single individuals are actually living alone or whether they share lodgings. The questionnaire from which the data come simply states “Head of family... None,” which could mean a group of people could live together, none of whom is considered the “head” of the family.

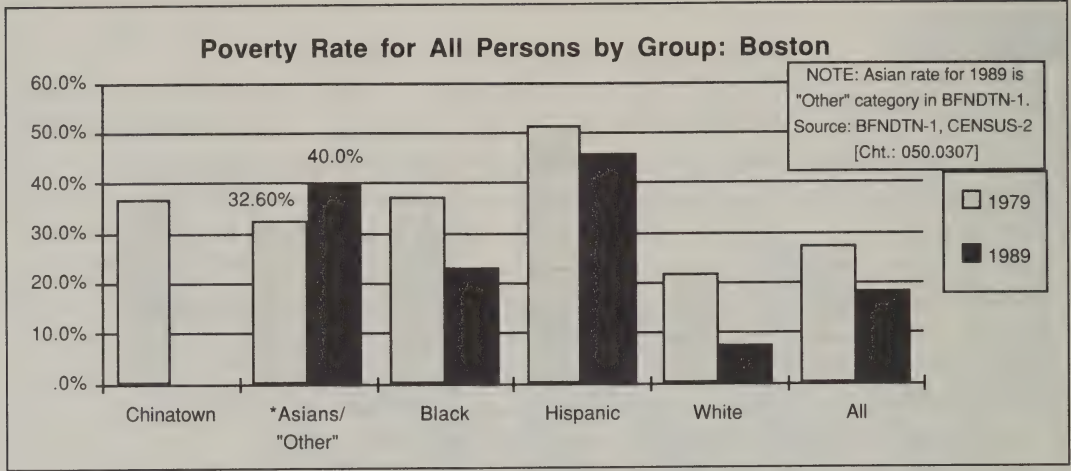
## INCOME



According to the Population Reference Bureau, poverty rates for immigrants and refugees are highest for the more recent arrivals. One factor that may account for this is that earlier arrivals have had time to establish themselves and to work out of poverty. Moreover, the immigration law preference system gives priority to persons with needed skills who are likely to find employment relatively quickly. It should also be noted that except for arrivals from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Vietnam, poverty rates for immigrants are relatively low regardless of the year of arrival. One possible explanation for the differences in poverty rates may have to do with United States immigration policy.

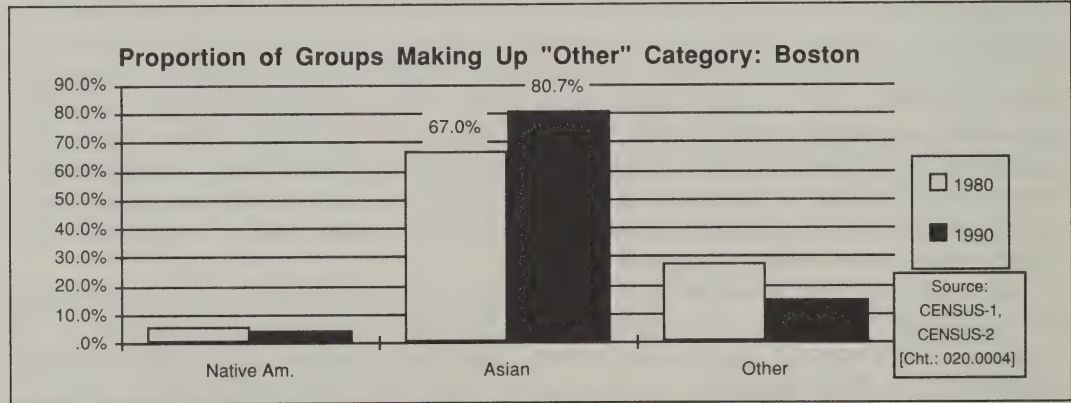
The poverty rates for immigrants from Taiwan or Hong Kong reflect not only persons immigrating under the skills preference, but also persons utilizing the family reunification preferences to join family members already in the United States. If many of these people are related to members of the urban working class, then poverty rates for this group may be considerably higher than the 22.8 percent poverty rate indicated on the chart, since the chart's figures also include persons immigrating under the skills preference who may be better off economically. The socioeconomic bipolarity of the Chinese community results, in part, from the differences between immigrants utilizing the "family reunification" versus "skills" preferences of United States immigration policy.

Poverty rates for Vietnamese refugees are significantly higher for the most recent arrivals. This may be partly understood if we consider that this period includes the "second wave" of refugees, which included fishermen and farmers with little formal education, or youth sent by their parents. The 1986 Massachusetts Department of Mental Health sample found that 83.13 percent of Vietnamese had lived in this country five years or less. The lower poverty rate for Vietnamese who immigrated prior to 1980 constitutes the "first wave" of refugees, who tended to be better educated, with connections to the United States government and familiarity with Western culture.



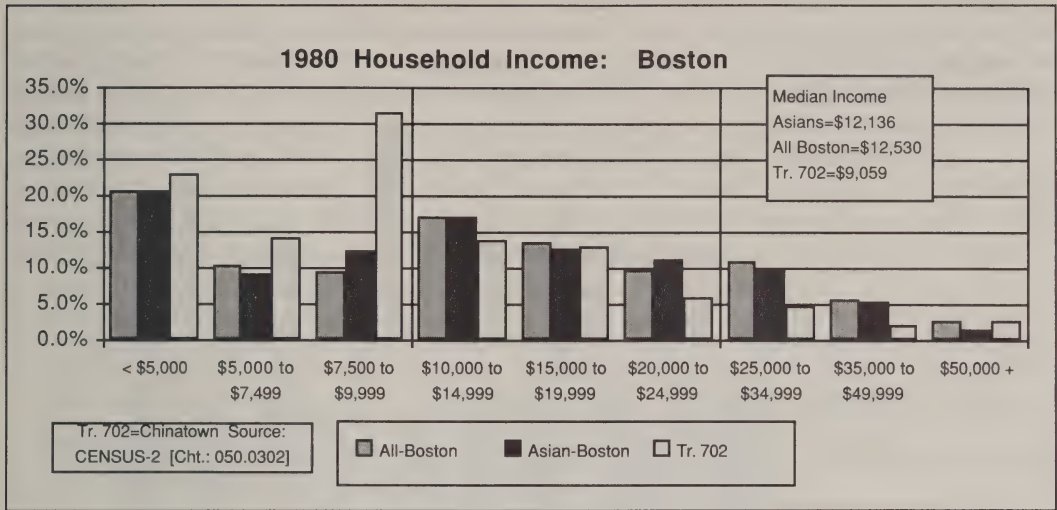
The light bars in the chart above represent data from the 1980 Census representing income in 1979; the black bars represent data from the Boston Persistent Poverty Project report on poverty in Boston, *In the Midst of Plenty*. The category "Asians/'other'" compares Asian poverty rates in 1979 with poverty rates of "others" for 1989. This group of "others" includes groups other than blacks, Hispanics, and whites; in other words, Asians, Native Americans and "others" not included in the previous racial groups.

The 1989 report, *In the Midst of Plenty*, did not report data specifically for Asian Americans, but rather included them as part of the "other" category. The chart below breaks down the groups which comprised the "other" category for Census data for 1980 and 1990. This analysis indicates that Asian Americans comprised 67 percent in 1980 and 80.7 percent in 1990 of the "other" (not white, black, or Latino) category.

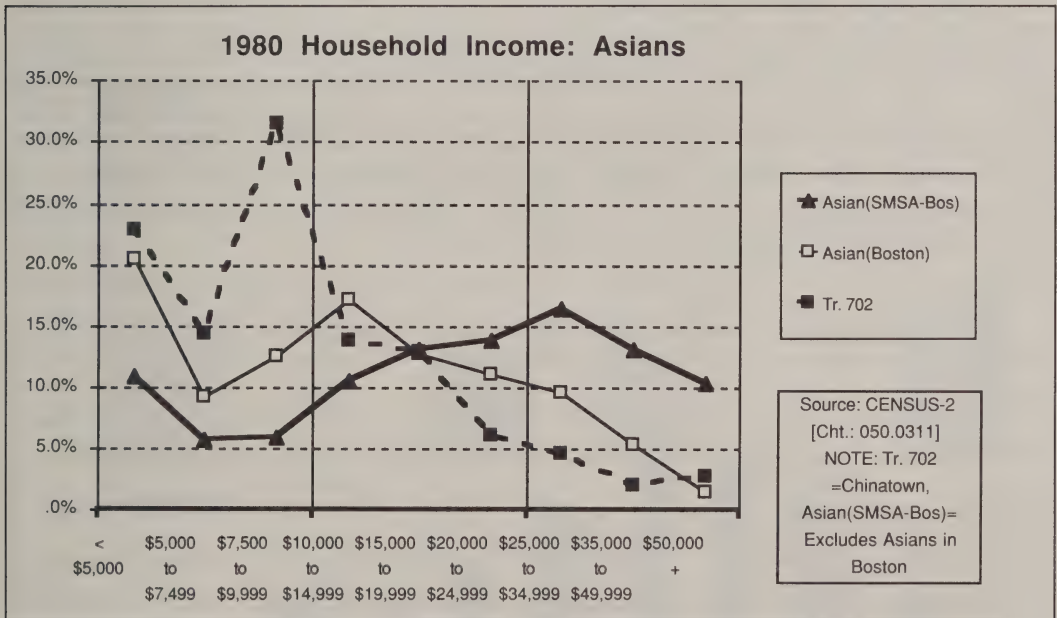


If we assume that Asian Americans also constituted approximately 80 percent of the "Asian/'other'" poverty group in 1989 (the black bar in the chart "Poverty Rate for All Persons by Group: Boston"), and if Asians were "poor" at about the same rate as the rest of this category's population, then (at 125 percent of the federal poverty line) approximately 32 percent of Asians in Boston were "poor" in 1989 (80 percent of the "Asian/'other'" category is 32 percent of all Asians in Boston). One interpretation of the *In the Midst of Plenty* data, then, is that the poverty rate for Asians Americans in Boston did not improve over the decade 1979–1989. In other words, the poverty rate for Asian Americans in 1989 was about the same as it was in 1979.



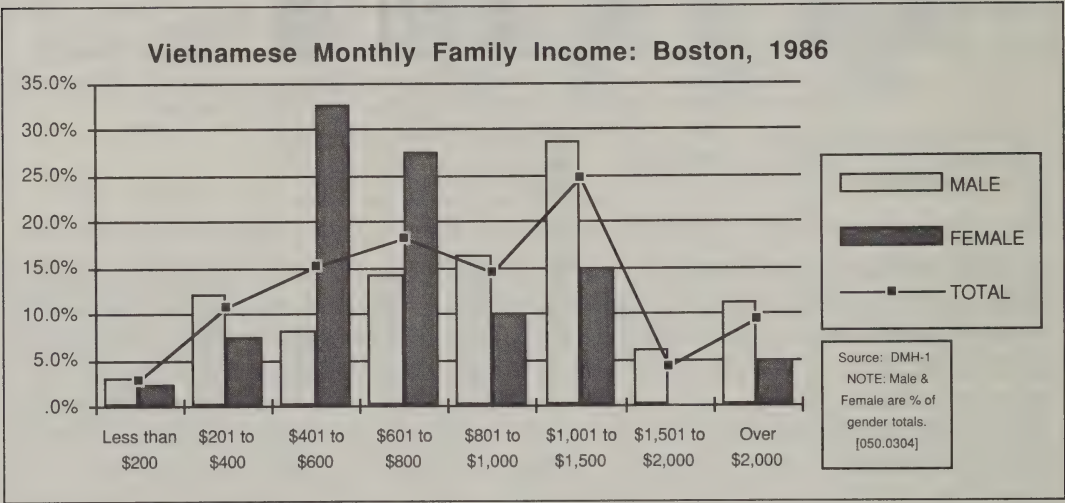


In 1980, the median household income for all Boston was \$12,530. Asian Americans in Boston had a median household income of \$12,136. For the residential area of Chinatown, Census Tract 702, which was 75.0 percent Asian, the figure was \$9,059. Persons earning less than \$10,000 a year in 1980 comprised 40.3 percent of the population for all Boston, 42.3 percent of Asians in Boston, and 68.9 percent of Tract 702. At the other end of the income scale, households with incomes of \$25,000 or more comprised 19.2 percent of Boston's population, 16.5 percent of Asian Americans in Boston, and only 9.5 percent of Tract 702.

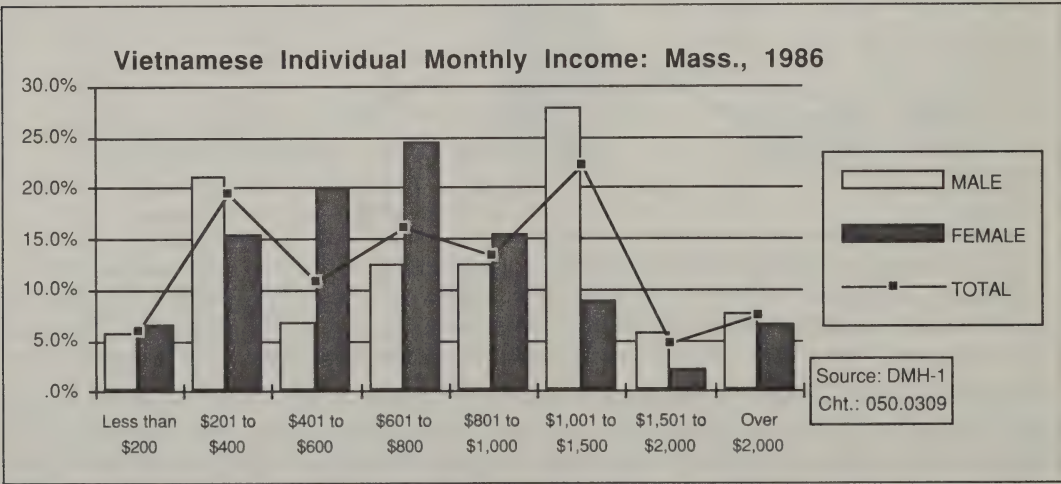


It should also be noted that Asian Americans living outside of Boston are considerably better off financially than Asian Americans in Boston. The median income for all Asians in the SMSA was \$16,998. The median incomes for Asians in Boston and Census Tract 702 were

71.4 percent and 53.3 percent of the median for Asians in the SMSA. This discrepancy of income is indicative of the bimodal income distribution which differentiates urban from suburban Asian Americans. Asian American households with incomes of less than \$10,000 a year comprised 30.9 percent of Asian Americans in the Boston SMSA, excluding Boston itself; 42.3 percent of Asians in Boston; and 68.9 percent of Census Tract 702. More than twice as many Asian households in Chinatown had incomes of less than \$10,000 a year than did Asians living outside of Boston in the Greater Boston area. At the other end of the income scale, Asian households in Census Tract 702 were only a third as likely to have incomes of \$25,000 or more as were Asians outside of Boston — 9.5 percent compared to 30.0 percent.

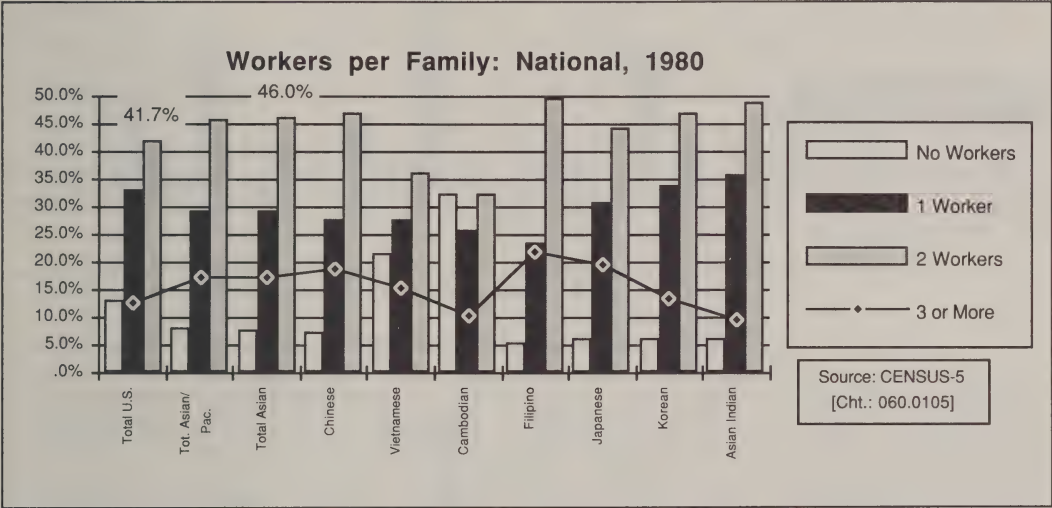


The Vietnamese community, as represented by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health's 1986 sample, indicates a significant discrepancy between male and female monthly family incomes. The majority of Vietnamese females have incomes in the lower half of the income distribution, with 60.0 percent earning between \$401 and \$800 a month, or less than \$9,600 a year in 1986. Vietnamese males in the sample tended to have higher incomes, with 44.9 percent having incomes between \$801 and \$1,500 a month. For the total sample, 61.6 percent had earnings less than or equal to \$1,000 a month.

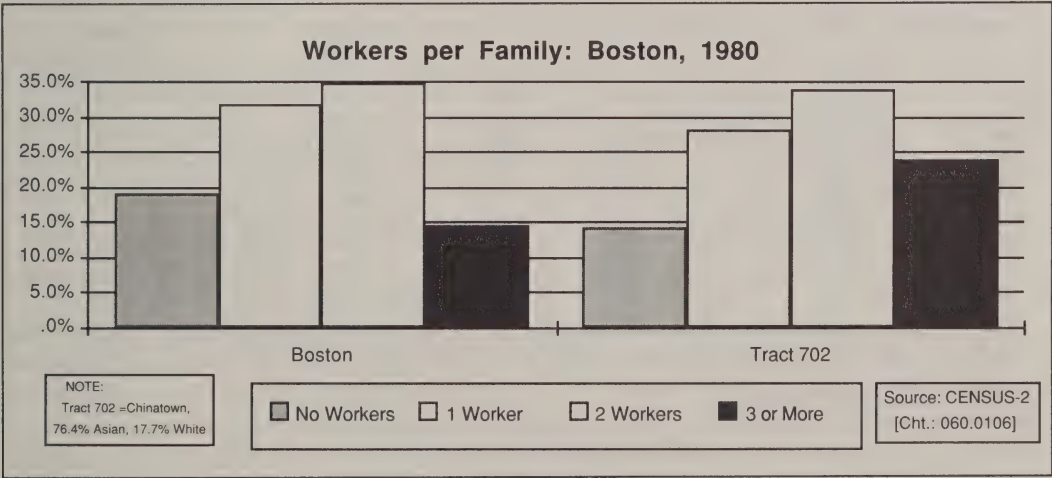


The distribution of incomes for individual Vietnamese males appears to be bimodal, with 21.2 percent at the \$201- to \$400-a-month peak and 27.9 percent at the \$1,000- to \$1,500-a-month peak. Vietnamese women appear to have a more “normal” income distribution, though slightly skewed toward the lower income level, with a mean in the \$601- to \$800-a-month range.

We were not able to obtain figures for the Cambodian community.



Asian Americans in the United States have more workers per family than the national average. In 1980, 41.7 percent of the national total of families had two workers, while 46.0 percent of Asian American families had two workers. A similar difference exists for families of three or more workers, with the national proportion being 12.5 percent, while for Asian Americans it is 17.3 percent.

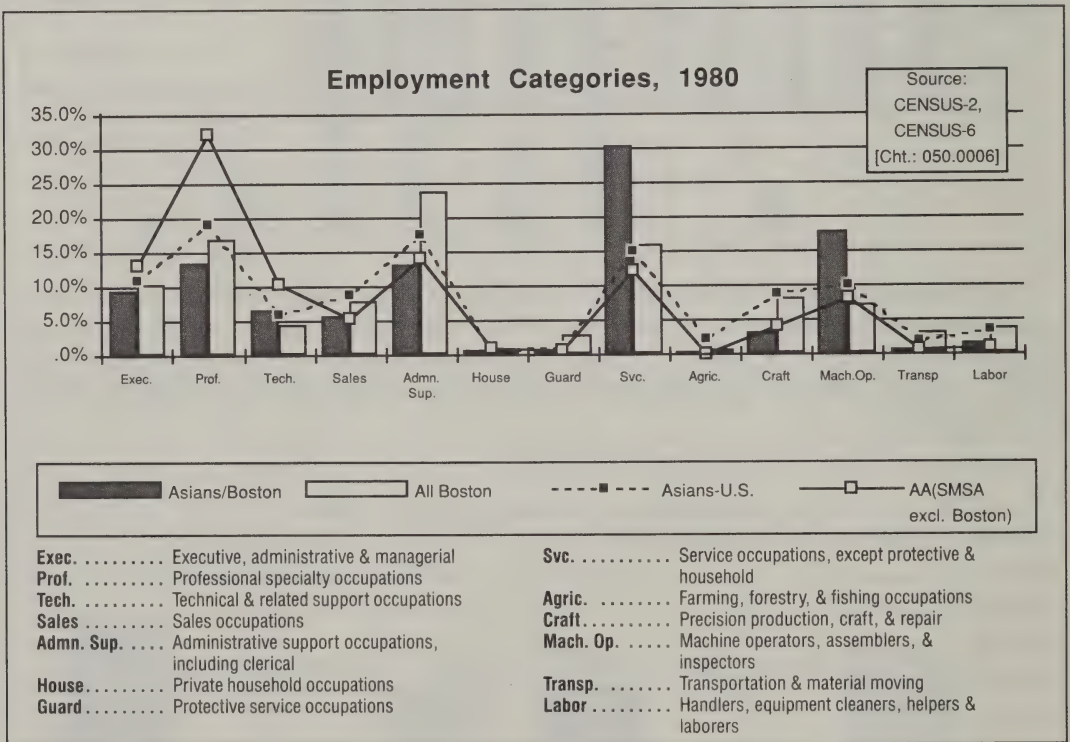




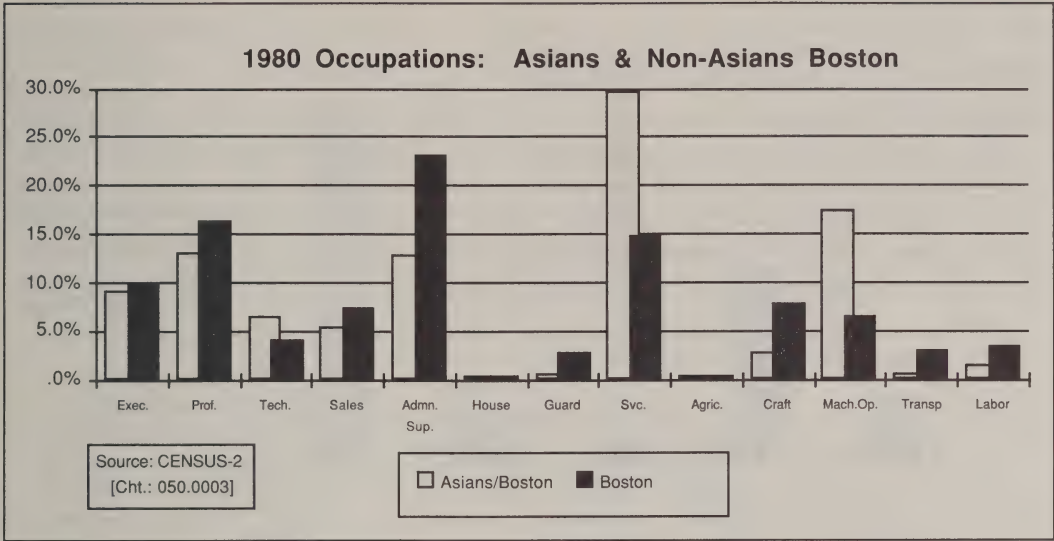
Boston as a whole has a larger proportion of one- and two-worker families than does Census Tract 702, which is the residential core of Chinatown. In 1980, this area was 76.4 percent Asian and 17.7 percent white. For families of three or more workers, the proportion is almost ten percent higher in the Chinatown area at 24 percent as it is for the city in general at 14.4 percent. Even with the high number of multi-worker families, over 35 percent of Asians in the area were at or below the 125 percent poverty level, which suggests that many of these people were working at very low-paying jobs.

## EMPLOYMENT

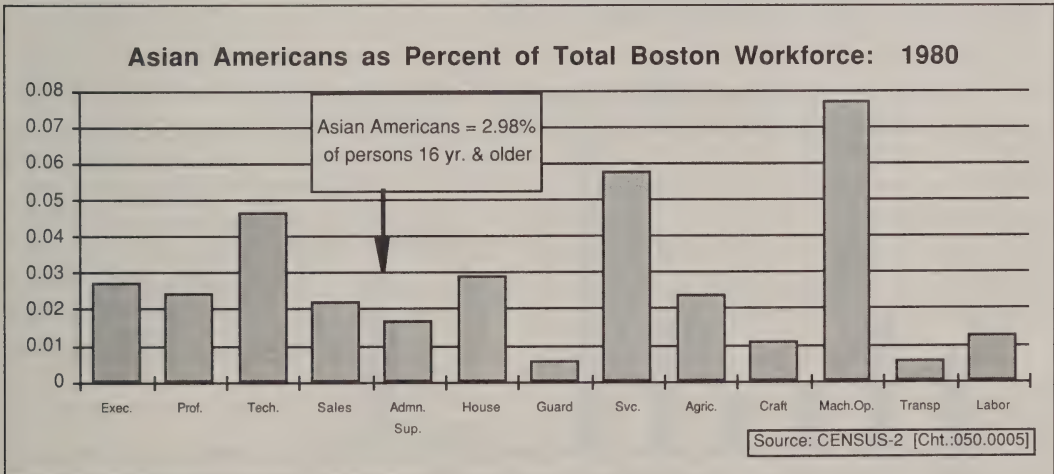
As was indicated in earlier chapters, Boston's Asian Americans can be divided into two groups: a poorer, less well-educated group living in the city itself, and a more affluent, better-educated group in the suburbs.



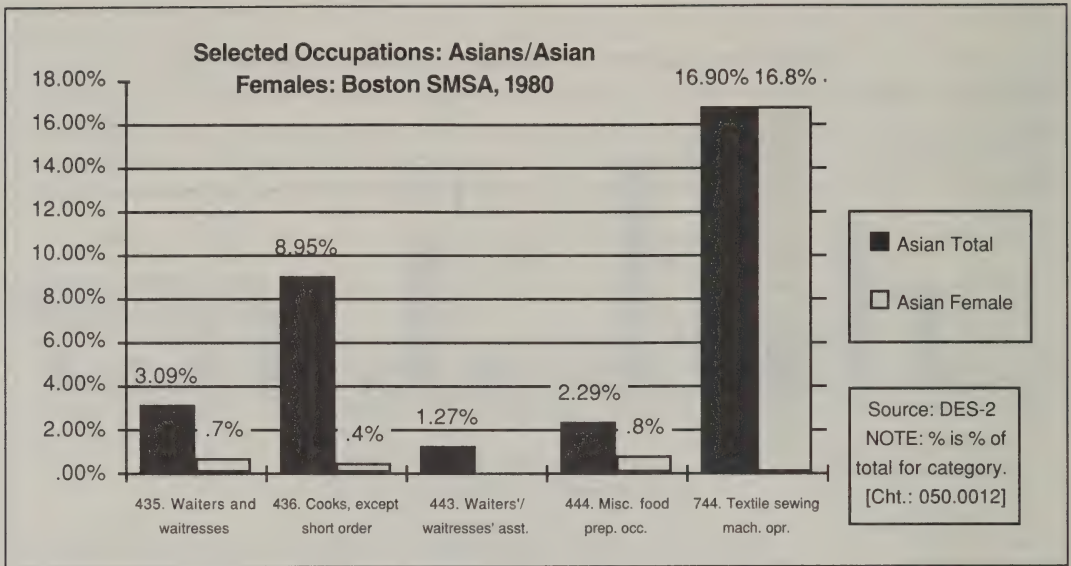
As we can see from the chart above, Boston's suburban Asian Americans have employment patterns similar to those of the national Asian American population. However, there are some noticeable differences in fields other than the first three categories on the chart — administrative, professional, and technical — in which Asian Americans nationally were slightly more likely to be employed in non-professional fields than Asians within the suburban Boston area. Asians in suburban Boston were almost twice as likely as the Asian national average to be employed as professionals, and more than twice as likely as Asians in the city of Boston.



Comparing employment patterns of Boston's Asian Americans with those of non-Asians, we can see that Asians are far more likely to find occupations in the service industry sector and as machine operators. These two categories correspond to the traditional Chinatown occupations of waiter and garment worker, and, to some extent, electronics assembler. Asians are almost twice as likely to be in service occupations, and more than twice as likely to be machine operators, as are workers in Boston in general. Conversely, Asians are significantly less likely to have jobs in administrative support, clerical, or in craft and precision production occupations, as these latter two categories tend to require a command of English or craft union membership.

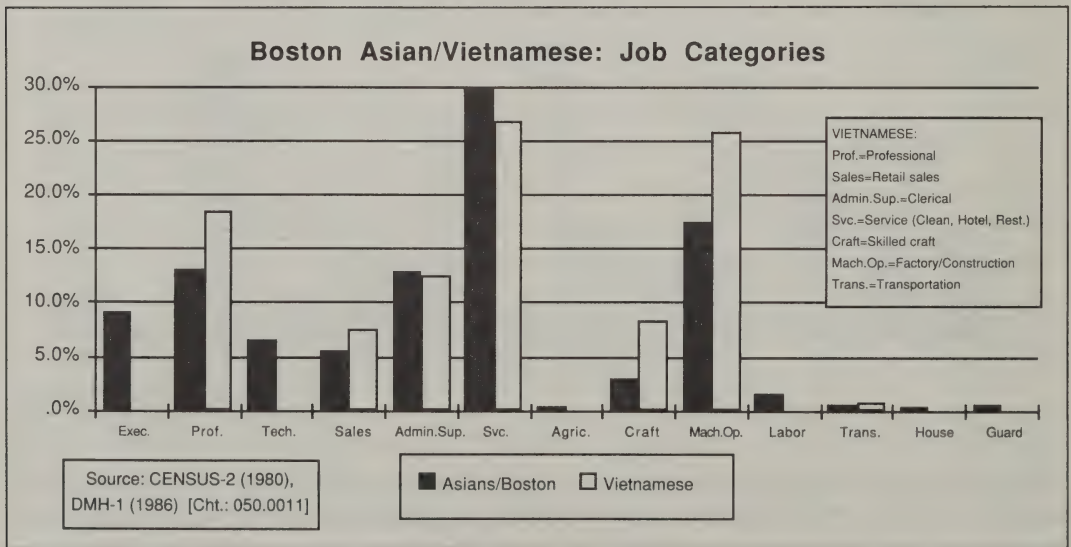


In 1980, Asian Americans were over-represented as technicians, service workers, and machine operators. While Asians comprised only 2.98 percent of adults of working age (over 16 years old), they made up 4.6 percent of technical and related support workers, 5.8 percent of service workers, and 7.7 percent of machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors.



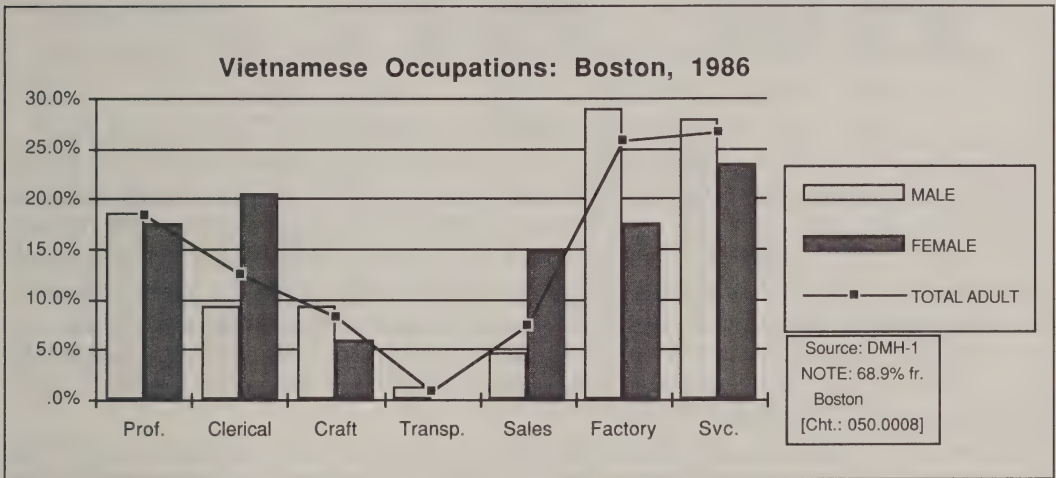
Examining specific employment categories for 1980, the Department of Employment Security (DES-2) reports that Asian American women comprised 16.8 percent of all textile sewing machine operators in the Greater Boston area — more than five times their presence in the general population. Asian American women far outnumbered Asian American men in this field, comprising 99.3 percent of all Asian workers in this field.

Nearly the opposite relationship held for the category of “cooks, except short order,” for which Asian American men comprised 9 percent of the total Greater Boston work force — about three times their proportion of the population, and 95.4 percent of Asian American workers in that field. Asian American men also tended to predominate as waiters, making up 76.6 percent of Asian Americans in this occupation.

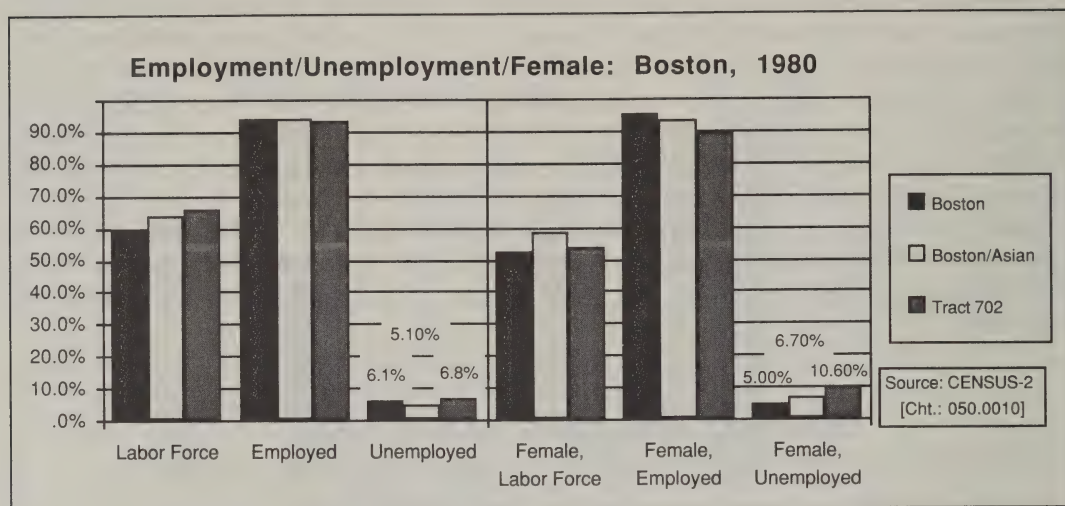




According to the 1989 study by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH), Vietnamese had employment patterns similar to the overall trend for Asians in Boston. However, the categories comparing “all Asians” to Vietnamese are not the same for the two groups. In the above chart, the category headings refer to the abbreviated U.S. Census/Department of Labor categories. The box on the chart gives the headings used by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), which appear to be broader. For example, the category “professional” for Vietnamese, may also include the “executive” category in the Census. In addition, the categories of “craft,” “machine operator,” and “labor” may overlap categories when comparing the Census and DMH data. Also, the data for the interviews were collected at different periods, with the Vietnamese data from 1986 and the Census data from 1980.



The DMH study shows about an equal proportion of males and females in the professional occupations, and, to a lesser extent, in “service” industries such as cleaning, hotel, and restaurant work. Vietnamese women are about twice as likely to have clerical and sales jobs as are Vietnamese men, who are more likely to have craft, factory, and transportation jobs. The actual sample on which these conclusions are based is small, however, representing 86 males and 34 females. The proportion of Vietnamese women who work outside the home is lower than that of the Asian female labor force in Boston. Asian women were about 44 percent of the total Asian American labor force in 1980, compared to 28.3 percent of Vietnamese women in 1986. This discrepancy probably reflects patterns in the Vietnamese community itself, which is disproportionately male. The DMH study found a 3:2 male-to-female ratio. The study attributes this to the “perils of the escape [which] limited the number of female refugees” (DMH-1, p. 10).



In 1980, the unemployment rate of Asian Americans in Boston was slightly better than that of Boston in general: 5.1 percent versus 6.1 percent. For Asians in Census tract 702 (Chinatown), it was slightly worse: 6.8 percent. For Asian females, the unemployment rate was slightly worse: 5 percent for all of Boston, 6.7 percent for Asians in Boston, and 10.6 percent for women in Chinatown. This last figure may reflect, in part, the seasonal nature of the garment industry, a major employer of women in the Asian American community. Unfortunately, there are indications that this figure has significantly worsened in the years since 1980, reaching crisis proportions in 1991.

The garment industry has been in decline since the late 1970s. The membership of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) has reportedly declined by 50 percent over this period. One recent study found only three union garment factories remaining in the area. Even for the existing garment factories, the amount of work has apparently been declining, so that even though factories remain open, there may be less business, and therefore, less work. In 1988, the Department of Employment Security identified "textile operators and setters" as one of the fastest declining occupations among the Production and Transportation Occupations, losing 1,330 jobs, a decrease of 31.6 percent, during the 1987 fiscal year (DES-1, p. 81).

According to a 1991 study by Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies (CLMS-1), the Massachusetts economy "has been losing wage and salary jobs for the past 26 months," making this current recession the "longest and deepest that has been experienced in the state since the Great Depression" (CLMS-1, p. 1). The CLMS study estimated that the average unemployment rate for the first half of 1991 after corrections for persons no longer counted by the Current Population Survey was 11.4 percent rather than the published 9.1 percent (CLMS-1, p. 23).

In periods of economic insecurity, characterized by a high rate of unemployment, people tend to forgo activities such as dining out. This has had a powerful effect on the restaurant industry in recent years. The Chinese Progressive Association's Workers Center estimates that unemployment among Chinese restaurant workers is now about 25 percent. In February, 1991, Asian Americans made up 10.6 percent of the claimants at the Boston unemployment insurance office—about twice the proportion of Asian Americans in the general population.





When the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health conducted its study of the Vietnamese community in 1986, unemployment in the Vietnamese community was estimated to be about 40 percent, though estimates as low as one-in-eight or 13 percent have also been offered by Mr. Hiep Chu, executive director of the Vietnamese American Civic Association in Dorchester (Chu).

Another DMH study (*Refugee Mental Health Needs Assessment*, 1989) presented a rank ordering of "occupational background" in which Cambodians listed "unemployment" most frequently.

	Cambodian	Vietnamese
Unemployment .....	1	3
Laborer .....	2	2
Student .....	3	1
Paraprofessional .....	4	5
Professional .....	5	4

Mr. Peter Chea of the Cambodian Community of Massachusetts estimates that roughly one-third of Cambodians in Boston are currently unemployed, although the proportion may be higher.

## EDUCATION

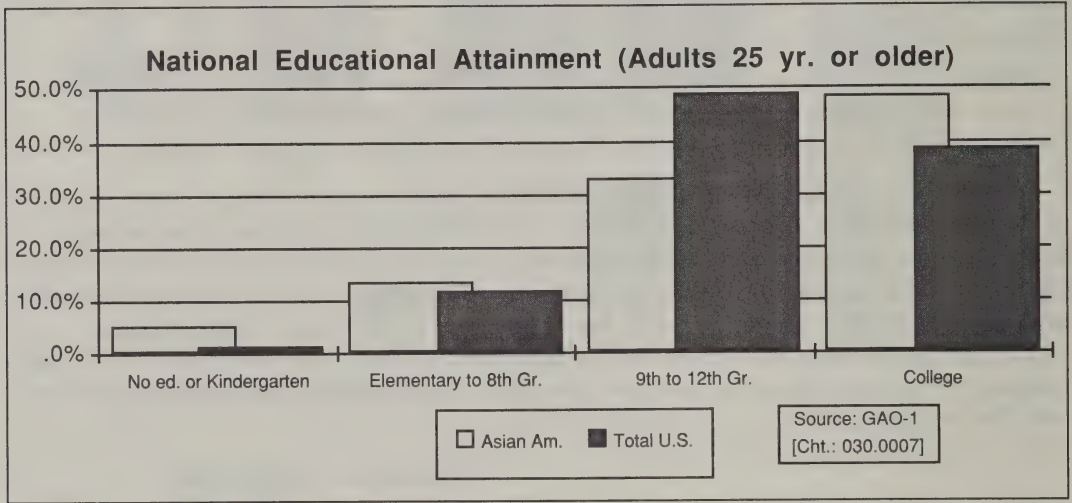
Asian Americans have been stereotyped as the "model minority" characterized by the unusual achievements of exceptional students, such as the refugee who arrives in the United States speaking no English and a few years later wins a major spelling bee. While these achievements should be acknowledged, it should also be understood that they are exceptions. Even the unusually high educational level of Asian Americans nationally is partly a function of our immigration policy, which gives preference to immigrants with special skills and advanced educational backgrounds.

In addition, Census data include foreign students, many of whom are in graduate programs. During the disturbances in Tiananmen Square, for example, some professors at American universities began worrying that China might recall its students. This would have meant the loss of a significant number of graduate students, which would, in turn, cripple

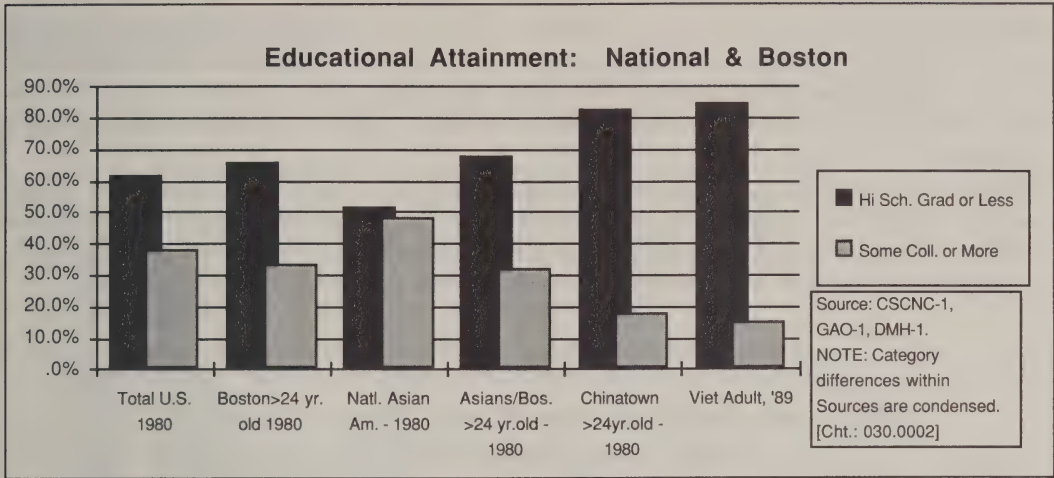


American science teaching, as colleges depend on graduate students as teaching assistants.

Asian Americans place a high value on education for cultural reasons, as a hedge against racism, and as a way the children of immigrants can improve their lives. It is a qualification that cannot be taken away. The seeming preference of Asian Americans for the sciences results partly from teachers who track Asian American students in that direction, and partly from encouragement by immigrant parents who recognize that the "hard sciences," because of their empirical basis, may be less susceptible to "cultural" and racial bias. As one immigrant father told his son: "Be an engineer. Two plus two is four in any language." The financial return from working in the scientific and technical fields is another important factor.



Nationally, the educational attainment of Asian Americans clearly surpasses that of the general population. In 1980, nearly 50 percent of Asian Americans were college graduates, compared to slightly less than 40 percent for the nation as a whole. But if the distribution of educational attainment is examined, it appears that the Asian sample is skewed toward a greater number of persons with a higher education. Comparing the Asian American sample with the total United States sample shows us that a greater proportion of adults over the age of 25 in the United States have at least some high school education than does the Asian American sample. In other words, in 1980, a larger proportion of Asian Americans had less than a 9th grade education than did the country as a whole.



In comparing the national educational attainment figures for the total United States and total Asian American populations with Boston, the contrasts become sharper. Boston, in spite of the many colleges in the immediate area, has a lower percentage of college-educated persons than does the nation as a whole.

Asian Americans in Boston have a very different educational profile than do Asian Americans nationally. Nationally, nearly one of every two Asian American adults has a college degree. Asians in Boston have a profile comparable to that of Boston as a whole, which is lower than the total United States sample. The figures for Chinatown were compiled from information on Census Tract 702, which is essentially the residential section of Chinatown. The educational attainment of adults in this area is even lower than that of the Asian American population of all of Boston. In this sample, 17.4 percent of adults had at least some college education, as compared to 32 percent of Asians in Boston and 48 percent of Asians nationally (CSCNS-1, p. 47). Tom Lun-nap Chung, in his study "Job Expectations and Opportunities of Asian American Clients," concluded that for Asian Americans, the "higher their education, the farther away they settled from Chinatown." In addition, compared to the city population in general, Asians had the "same proportion of college graduates..." but "a much larger proportion of the least educated" (CSCNS-1, p. 48).

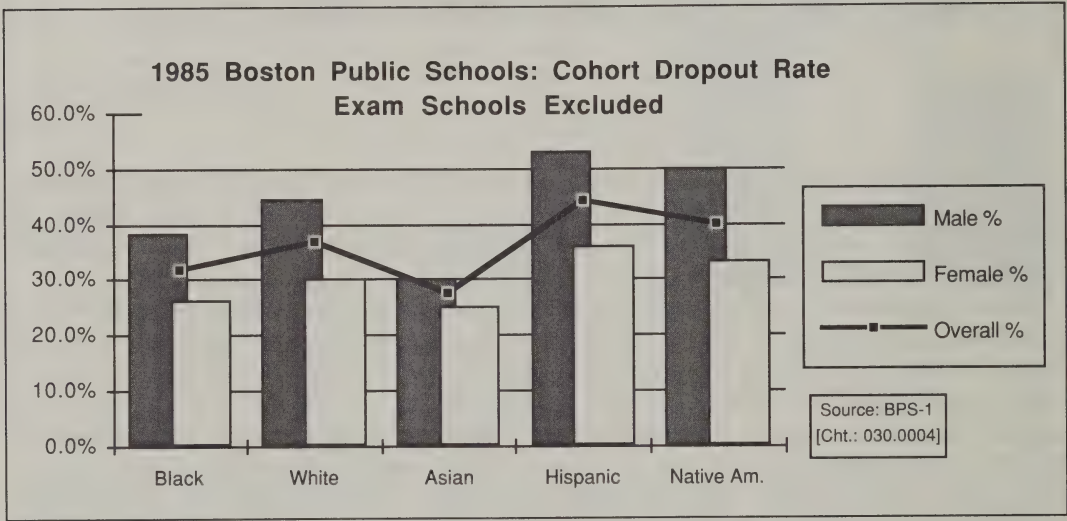
The right-most columns of the chart above represent a study by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health published in 1989 (DMH-1). This study found that Vietnamese adults had apparently even less education than the Chinatown sample. This probably reflects the nature of the second wave of Vietnamese refugees, who were generally less educated than the Vietnamese of the first wave, and who settled in Boston in greater numbers than the first group.

The DMH figures are somewhat misleading in that "college education" for the most part means an education in Vietnam. As many immigrants have discovered, a foreign college degree is not always recognized by American institutions.

The DMH study also asserted that the literacy rate among Vietnamese was nearly 100 percent. This is attributed to the strenuous efforts by both the North and South Vietnamese to educate their populations. The Vietnamese American Civic Association (VACA) in Dorchester, however, did not find this to be the case. When VACA attempted to do a survey of Vietnamese in the area, they found that many people were not able to answer the questionnaire, even though it was written in Vietnamese, and had to turn to VACA for help in completing it.

We were not able to obtain any studies on educational attainment for the Cambodian community. Peter Seyla Chea, Executive Director of the Cambodian Community of Massachusetts (CCM) in Chelsea, estimated that about one-third of Cambodians, mostly of the immigrant generation, were illiterate. This is not surprising, given the efforts of the Pol Pot regime between 1975 and 1978 to eliminate all Western influence, including the educated population.

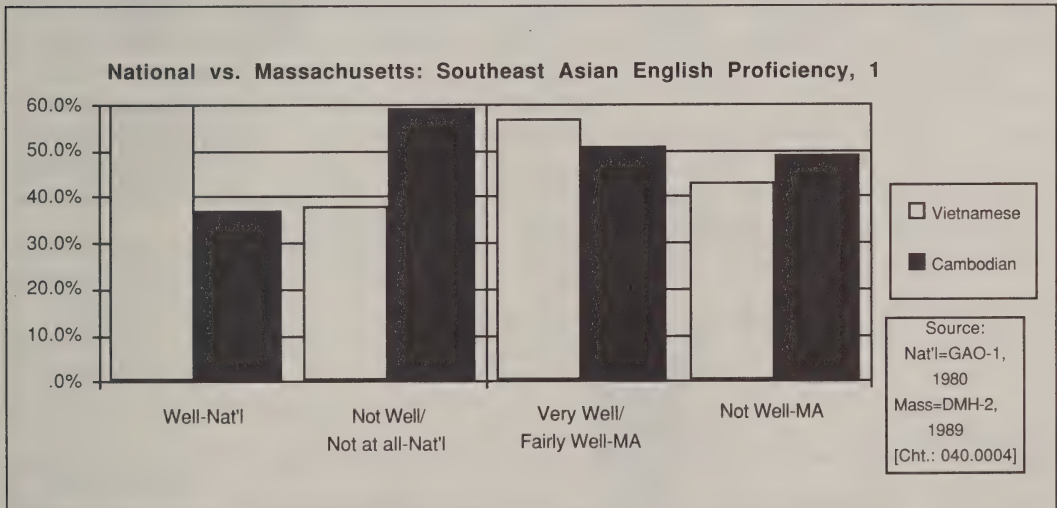
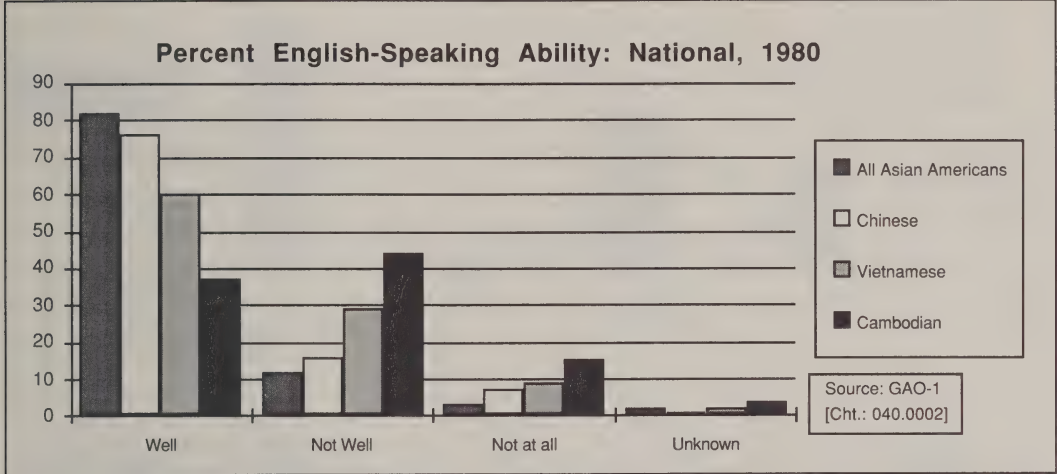
The lack of formal education does not necessarily mean a lack of skills. Mr. Chea remarked that the Cambodian community has many skills, though they are not transferable to jobs. For example, many Cambodians are skilled carpenters, but their form of carpentry is "not important" here, as carpenters in the United States employ different techniques.



Information about the educational attainment of Asian American youth in the Boston Public Schools is not reported in the breakdown by ethnic group. Information on student dropout rates is reported by black, white, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American. According to these data, which exclude the exam schools, "Asians" are less likely to be dropouts than any other racial group. Nevertheless, Asian American males experience a 30 percent dropout rate, with about 25 percent of Asian American females dropping out. Disaggregated data by nationality and quantitative research on students' experiences are needed to develop a clearer portrait of Asian American students in Boston's schools.

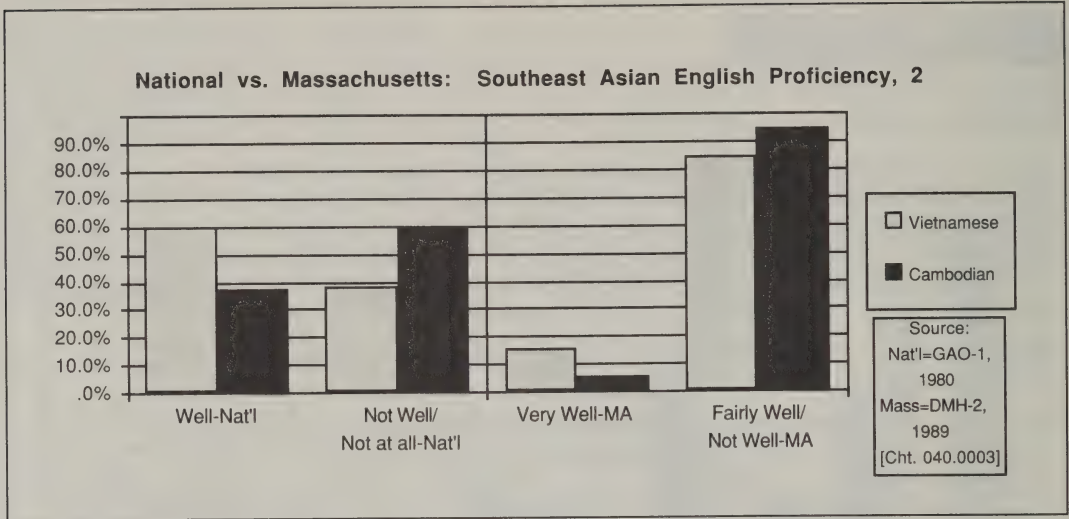


## ENGLISH FLUENCY

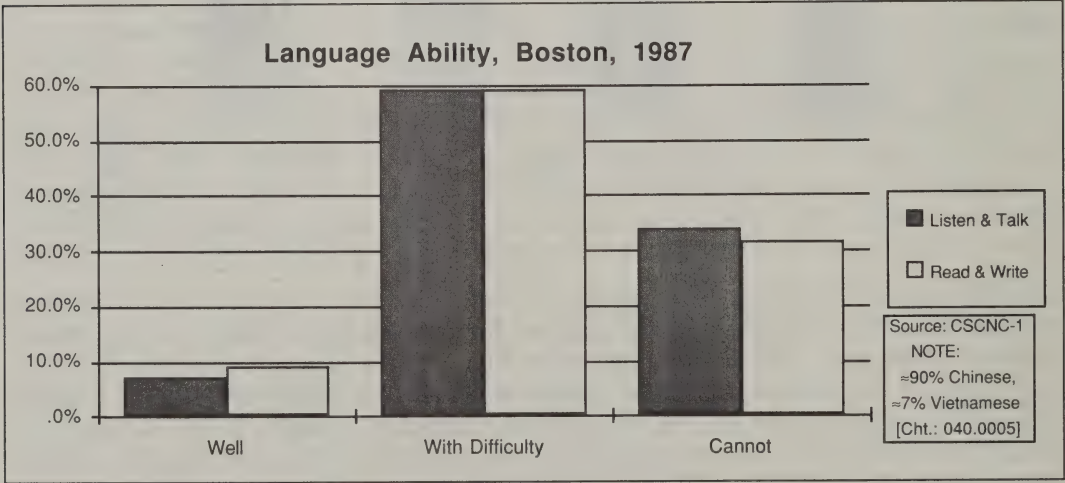


The 1980 General Accounting Office report on Asian Americans remarks that the “number of non-English or limited-English speakers appears high among those Asian Americans requiring public assistance.” The report further notes that the Association of Asian/Pacific Community Health Organizations “found that about 95 percent of its primarily low-income patients nationwide had limited or no ability to speak English” (GAO-1, p. 43). According to the GAO’s findings, 59 percent of Cambodians, 38 percent of Vietnamese, and 23 percent of Chinese spoke English “not well” or “not at all” (GAO-1, p. 44).

It is not clear whether the categories of “not well” in the GAO report and “fairly well” in the 1989 Massachusetts Department of Mental Health report are comparable. Both appear to use self-reports of competency. A combination of responses “very well” and “fairly well” from the DMH data would appear to approximate the GAO’s “speaks English well” category for Cambodians and Vietnamese. (See chart entitled: “National vs. Massachusetts: Southeast Asian English Proficiency, 1,” above.)



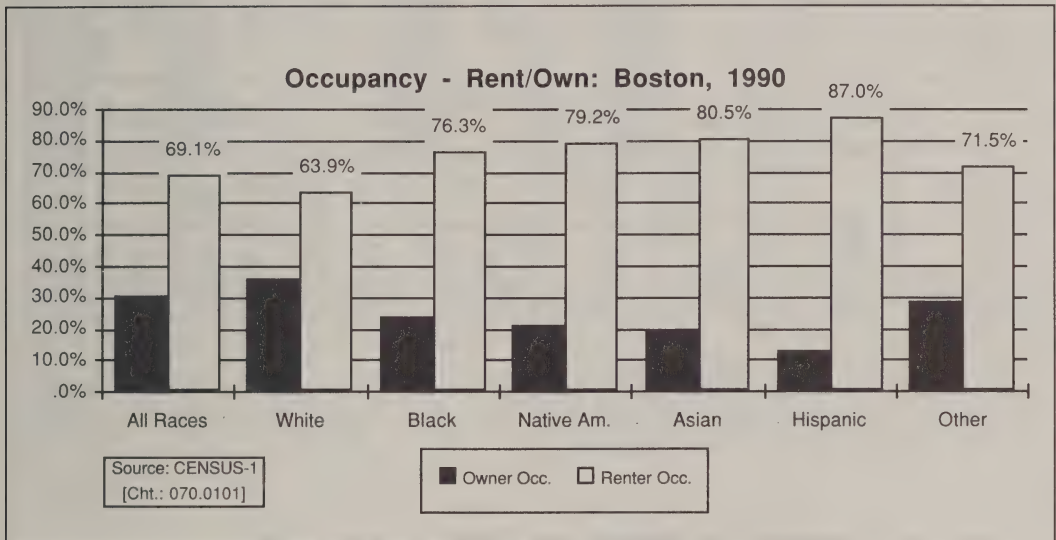
The DMH report cautions, however, that “moderate proficiency, represented by percentages of ‘fairly well’ response, needs to be interpreted with awareness of some critical factors. Even when language proficiency increases, most refugees’ dominant language remains that of their homeland and is often the primary one spoken at home. In most cases, refugees’ level of conversational English is greater than their level of comprehension and cross-cultural understanding” (DMH-2, p. 39). It may, therefore, be more useful to view English proficiency among Southeast Asians according to which groups do “very well” versus “fairly well/not well.” (See chart entitled: “National vs. Massachusetts: Southeast Asian English Proficiency, 2, above.) This interpretation suggests that over 80 percent of Vietnamese and over 90 percent of Cambodians in Massachusetts have problems understanding English.



Though we were not able to find data relating exclusively to Boston’s Chinese community, the sample from Tom Chung’s 1987 study (CSCNC-1) is approximately 90 percent Chinese. Almost 80 percent of the sample live in Boston. According to Chung, 99 percent of the sample were born abroad, and half came to the United States within the last three years. This study is not strictly comparable to the GAO and DMH samples, because its population was

drawn from clients who came to Chinatown seeking "job-related services." Persons from Chinatown and its immediately adjacent areas composed 55.4 percent of the sample; 18.5 percent were from a nearby or adjacent town; and the remaining 26.1 percent came from other Boston neighborhoods.

## HOUSING



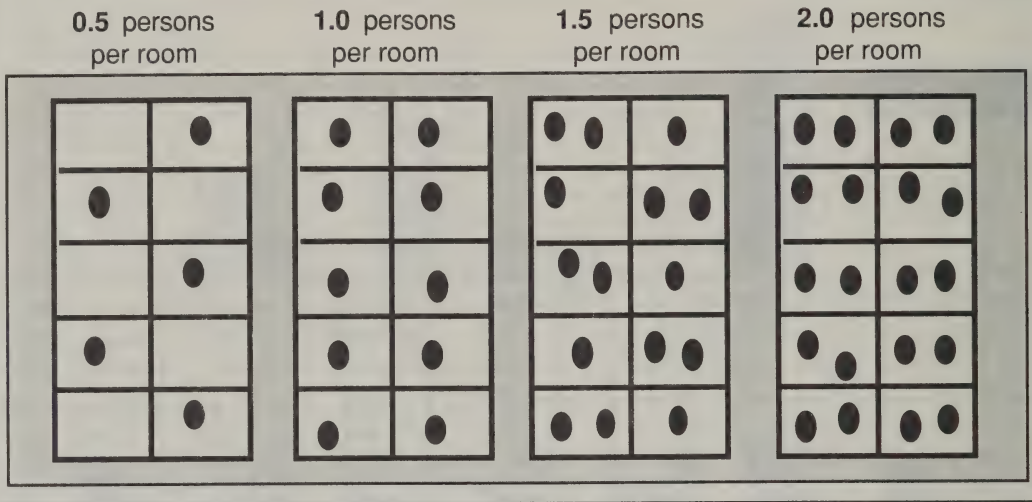
In 1990, most people in Boston rented rather than owned their homes. Overall, 69.1 percent of Boston's people rented. For Asian Americans, 80.5 percent were renters.

Furthermore, a 1991 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston revealed that Asians were 1.4 times as likely as whites to be rejected for mortgages in Boston. Asians comprised 2.7 percent of those who successfully received loan applications for mortgages in Boston in 1990, although their population in the city is 5.16 percent (GLOBE-3).

In 1980, 4.2 percent of Boston's population were living in households where people outnumbered rooms. At least three people shared two rooms in at least 1.7 percent of Boston's households. For all Asian Americans in Boston, the proportion of households where people outnumbered rooms was 25 percent, and the rate of households in which at least two people shared three rooms was 13.2 percent. The rate of crowding was even higher in Chinatown, where 36.7 percent of persons lived in households where people outnumbered rooms, and 19.6 percent lived in households in which at least two people had to share three rooms.

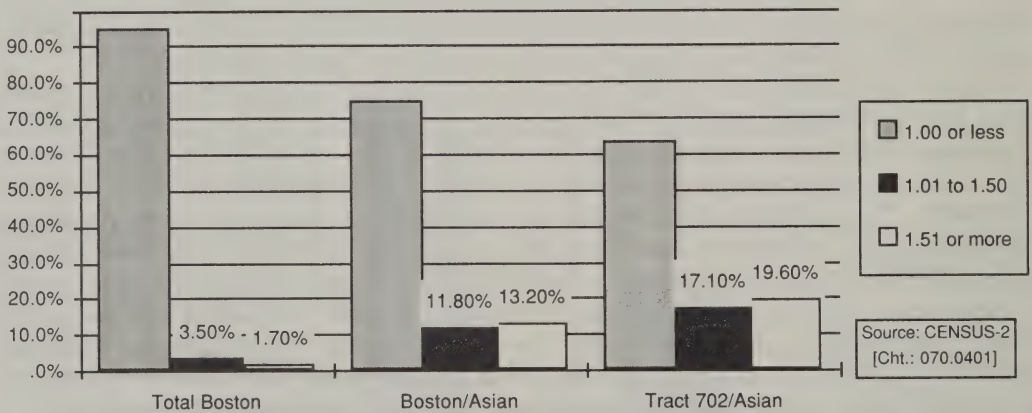


### Density: Persons per Room

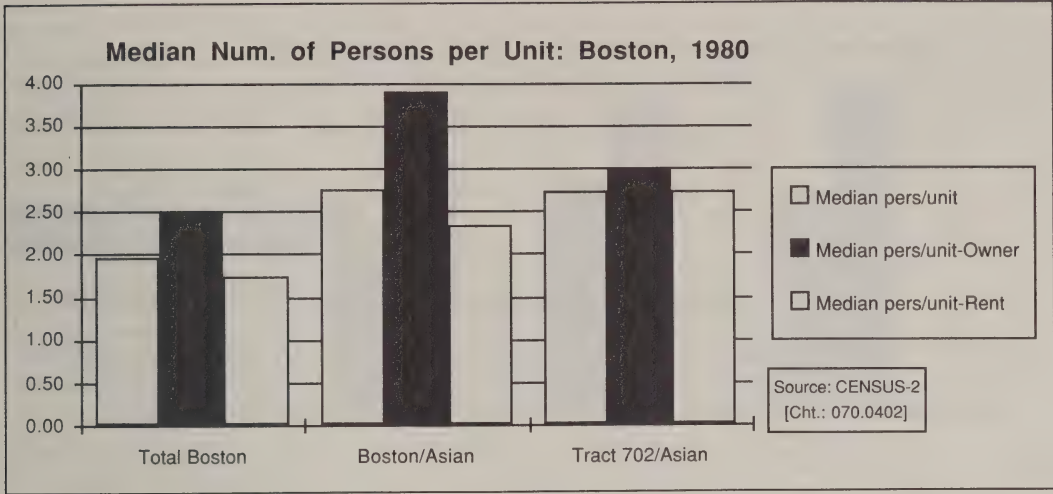


“Persons per room” is a rough measure of density. “Rooms” are those which are separate and “used for living purposes,” excluding, among others, bathrooms, porches, halls, utility rooms, and unfinished attics and basements.

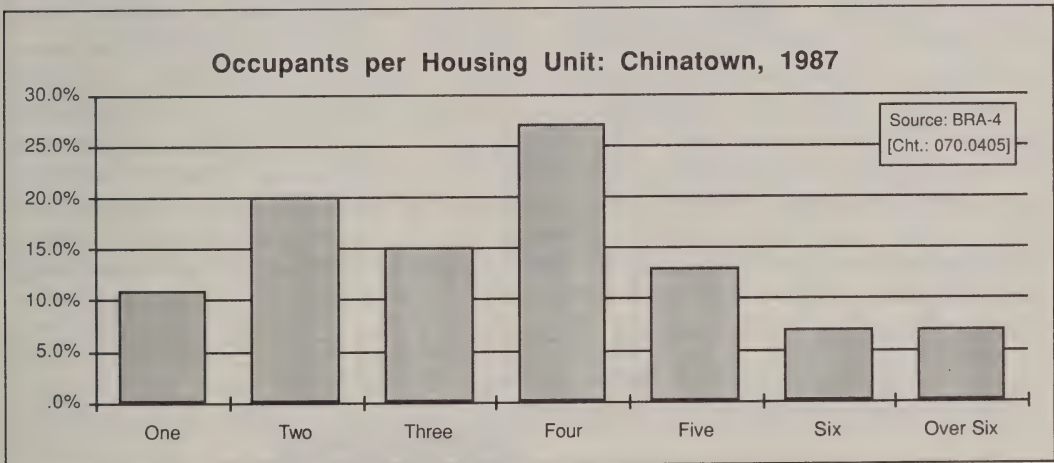
### Occupancy - Persons per Room: Boston, 1980



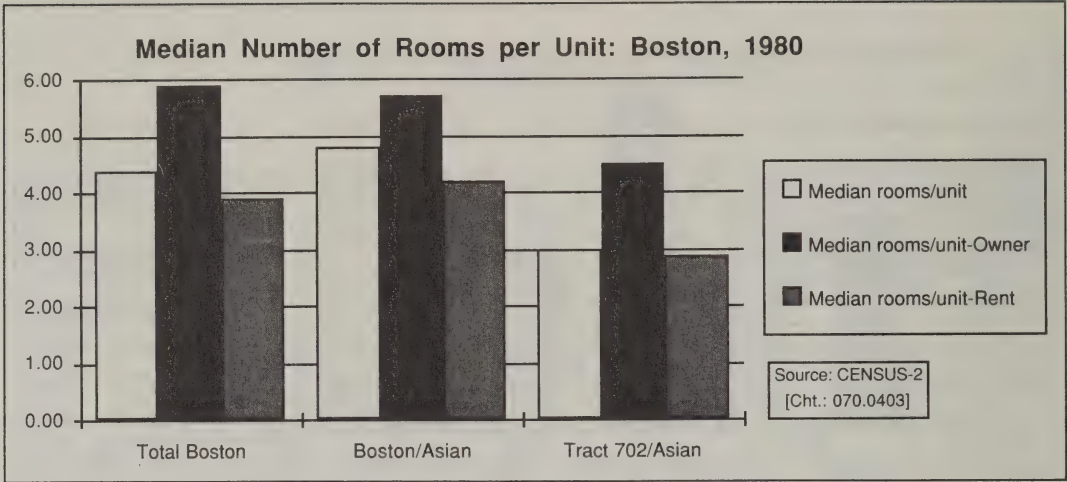
The 1986 Massachusetts Department of Mental Health assessment of Vietnamese needs (DMH-1) found that almost “70% of the Vietnamese live in low-rent apartments for \$400 or less a month (30% pay \$50 to \$200 a month for their share of rent with sometimes four people in a room, or over ten in an apartment)” (DMH-1, p. 26).



The median number of persons per unit in 1980 in Boston was 1.96. The median number of persons in owner-occupied units was 2.51; for renter-occupied units, it was 1.75. The median number of occupants in Asian American units in Boston was 2.57. On average, nearly four Asian Americans, 3.89, lived in each owner-occupied unit, while 2.33 lived in each renter-occupied unit. In Chinatown, the median number of persons per renter-occupied unit was higher still, with 2.74 persons. Nearly one more person per unit shared living quarters in Chinatown than did persons in Boston in general.

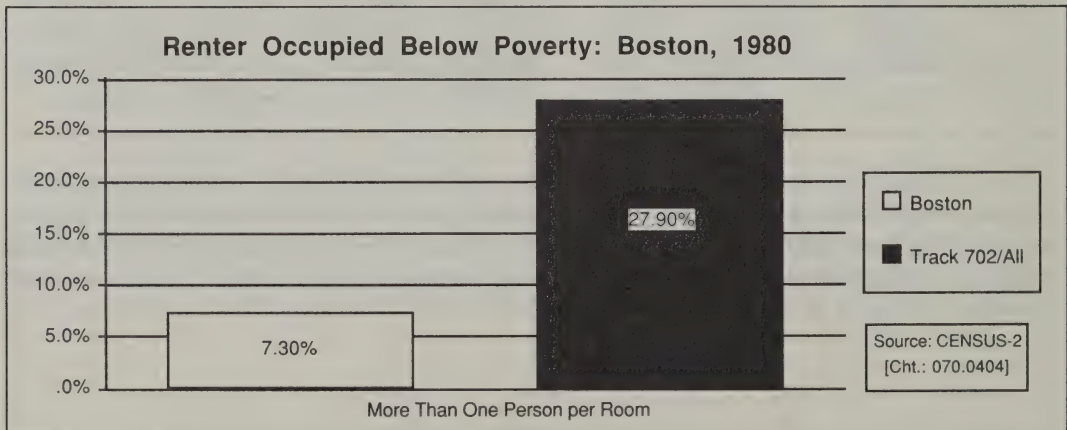


A 1987 study by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA-4), found that the modal number of occupants in Chinatown was four persons per unit, with a median of 3.58 persons per unit. The study noted that housing units "in Chinatown are small, while the number of residents per household is much higher than the City average, indicating a problem of overcrowding" (BRA-4, p. 2).



The BRA report found that the median number of rooms per unit was 4.2, with four rooms per unit being the most common size. There is a discrepancy between the 1987 BRA report and the 1980 Census. The BRA reports 4.2 rooms, and the Census reports a median of 3 rooms per unit. This discrepancy might be accounted for by the difference in the area surveyed. Whereas the BRA survey included seven blocks of the Chinatown business district, Census Tract 702 includes a large part of the area called “Bay Village,” and excludes the above-mentioned seven blocks of the Chinatown business district.

There are a large number of apartments located above businesses in Chinatown. These units are classified as “residential/commercial structures” in the BRA study. These structures tend to be in poorer condition than the strictly “residential” structures. Eight percent “of residential and 18 percent of residential/commercial structures have hallways with debris or obstructions” (BRA-4, p. 6). The report continues that, while only one percent of residential structures “share a common kitchen and 3 percent share a common bath...14 percent [of residential/commercial structures] have common kitchen facilities and 18 percent have common bathroom facilities” (BRA-4, p. 7). It continues that, while “many units appear to be in good condition, there are many units without accessible and private bathroom facilities; a significant number of buildings continue to have common kitchens as well as common bathrooms” (BRA-4, p. 2).



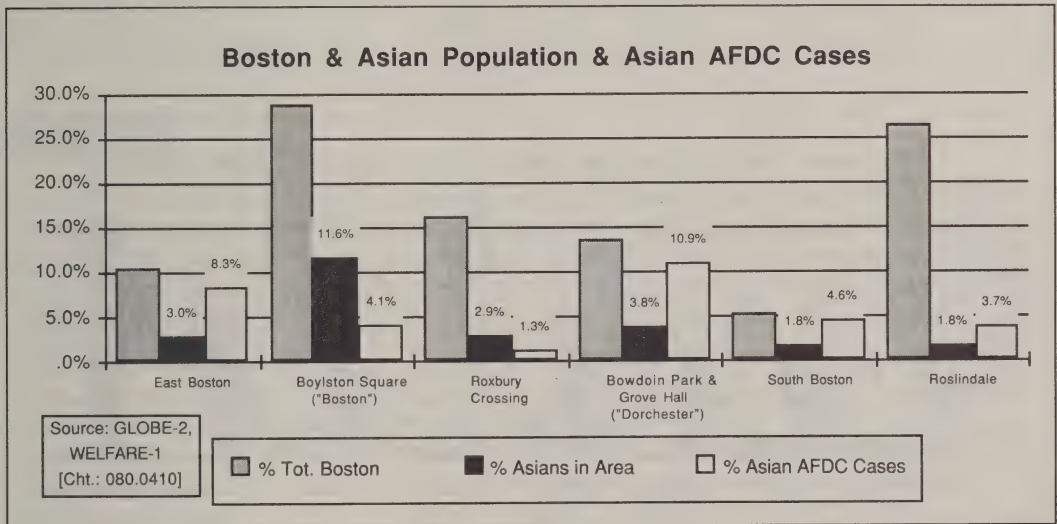


In 1980, 7.3 percent of the people in Boston with incomes below the 100 percent federal poverty line lived in renter-occupied units where people outnumbered rooms. In the Chinatown area, 27.9 percent of the people with an income below the 100 percent federal poverty line lived in renter-occupied units where people outnumbered rooms. (The 7.3 percent figure seems low, and may not reflect the large number of rooming houses in Boston in 1980.)

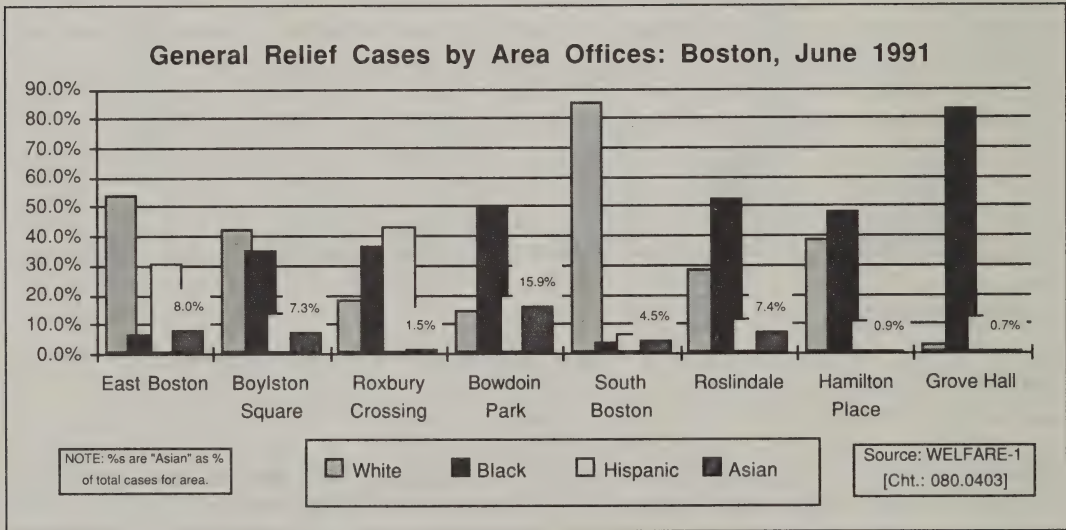
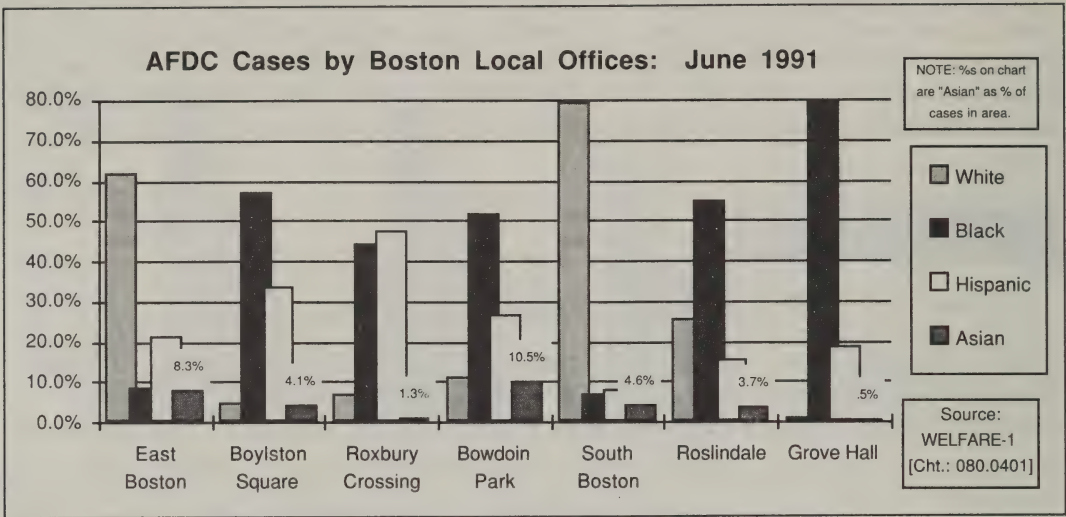
## PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

### Service Areas of Boston Welfare Offices

*East Boston* = East Boston    *Boylston Square* = "Boston"    *Roxbury Crossing* = Roxbury  
*Bowdoin Park* = Dorchester    *South Boston* = South Boston    *Roslindale* = Roslindale  
*Hamilton Place* = Homeless cases/recipients    *Grove Hall* = Dorchester



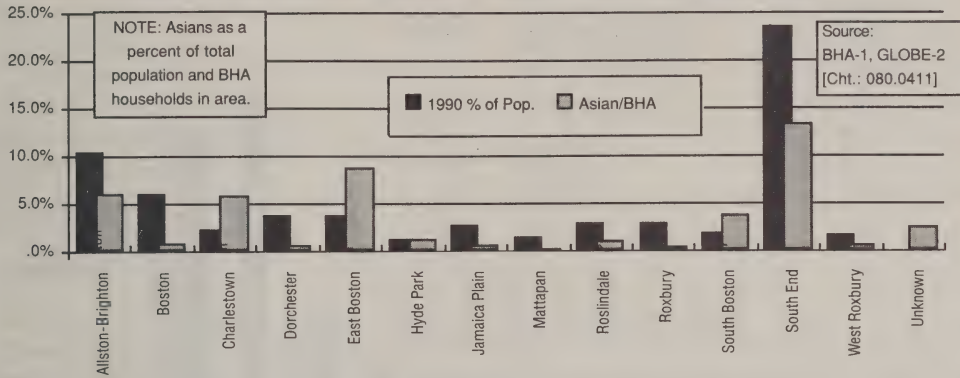
The above chart is a very rough comparison of the total population and Asian Americans in the area compared to the welfare rate of Asian Americans in those areas. For example, Asian Americans comprise about 11 percent of the population in the area served by the Boylston Square Area Office, while 4.1 percent of that office's cases are Asian. According to this analysis, Asian Americans are more likely to receive AFDC in the East Boston, Bowdoin Park/Grove Hall, South Boston, and Roslindale than in the Boylston Square or Roxbury Crossing areas.



The two charts above illustrate the AFDC and General Relief case load for June, 1991. Percentages for each area office equal 100 percent. Asian American General Relief cases in the East Boston area, for example, comprise 8 percent of the total welfare case load for that area's office.

East Boston and South Boston are the only service areas for which we have reasonable population estimates. Asian Americans make up approximately 3 percent of the East Boston service area, and 1.8 percent of the South Boston service area. Asian Americans make up 8.3 percent of AFDC and 8 percent of General Relief cases in the East Boston area, and 4.6 percent and 4.5 percent of the AFDC and General Relief cases, respectively, in the South Boston area.

Asian Americans in Boston Public Housing, Feb. 1991



## HEALTH

The 1990 General Accounting Office report *Asian Americans: A Status Report* noted that “[w]ith the exception of Southeast Asian refugees, the limited available information suggests that the health and nutrition of Asian Americans appear to be at least as good as that of the United States population generally” (GAO-1, p. 29). In a footnote, the report states that “[c]omprehensive data on the health and nutrition status of Asian Americans are not readily available. This is a category not covered by the decennial census. Other [national] surveys...do not publish data on Asian Americans because the Asian portion of the samples is too small, according to agency personnel” (GAO-1, p. 29, note 1).

National data reported in the GAO study indicate that Asian Americans have a longer life expectancy than white Americans. Asian Americans have lower mortality rates generally, and more specifically suffer less from heart disease, cancer, stroke, and homicide, than either white or African Americans. Infant mortality among Asian Americans is also lower than that for white or African Americans. These figures are based, however, primarily on three Asian groups: the Chinese, Filipinos, and Japanese, between 1980 and 1986.

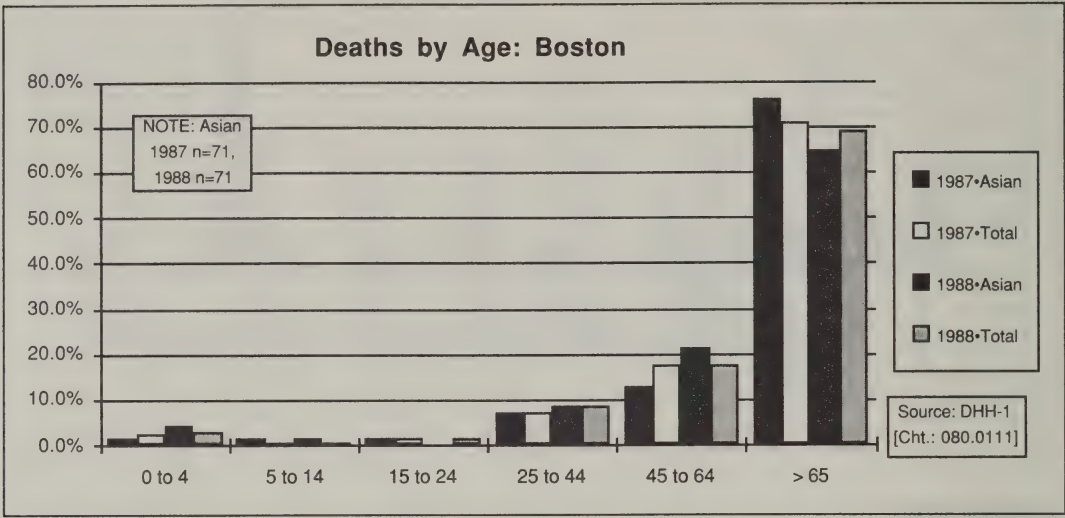
A problematic aspect of Asian American health relates primarily to Southeast Asian refugees, who suffer infection from tuberculosis, hepatitis B, and malaria at rates much higher than the population as a whole. Refugees’ rate of tuberculosis infection is almost 28 times higher than the national rate. For the rate of hepatitis B, overall infection is more than 14.6 times the national rate; malaria infection is 37.5 times the national rate.

The GAO report notes that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) believes that “tuberculosis and hepatitis B among Southeast Asian Americans pose significant public health challenges.” Nevertheless, the CDC expects to eliminate tuberculosis in this country by the year 2010. The CDC “does not currently consider malaria and other parasitic diseases—which rarely result in fatal illness—and nutritional abnormalities among refugee children to be major public health problems” (GAO-1, p. 36).

Dr. Jean Chin, director of the South Cove Community Health Center, stated that there was a 15 percent incidence of hepatitis infection in the local Asian community, as opposed to less than one percent for the general population. She agrees that it is possible that the extent of crowding in poorer households may contribute to the prevalence of tuberculosis and hepatitis B,



since they are infectious diseases. She also noted that an important form of transmission of hepatitis B is from mother to child, and that there is a “high rate” of toddler infection.



Mortality for Asian Americans in Boston is about the same as for the city in general. The top ten causes of death among Asian Americans were:

1987		1988	
All Other Causes	26.8%	Heart Disease	21.1%
Heart Disease	19.7%	Cerebrovascular	15.5%
Digestive & Peritonitis	11.3%	All Other Causes	12.7%
Respiratory	7.0%	Pneumonia & Flu	12.7%
Other, Unspecified	5.6%	Digestive & Peritonitis	7.0%
Cerebrovascular	4.2%	Septicemia	4.2%
Breast	2.8%	Respiratory	2.8%
Genital	2.8%	Other, Unspecified	2.8%
Cirrhosis	2.8%	Breast	2.8%
Nephritis, etc.	2.8%	Nephritis, etc.	2.8%
Septicemia	2.8%	Perinatal	2.8%
		Other Accidents	2.8%

These figures reflect the number of deaths from a particular cause as a percentage of the total number of Asian deaths for the year. The total number of Asian American deaths for both 1987 and 1988 was 71 (DHH-1).

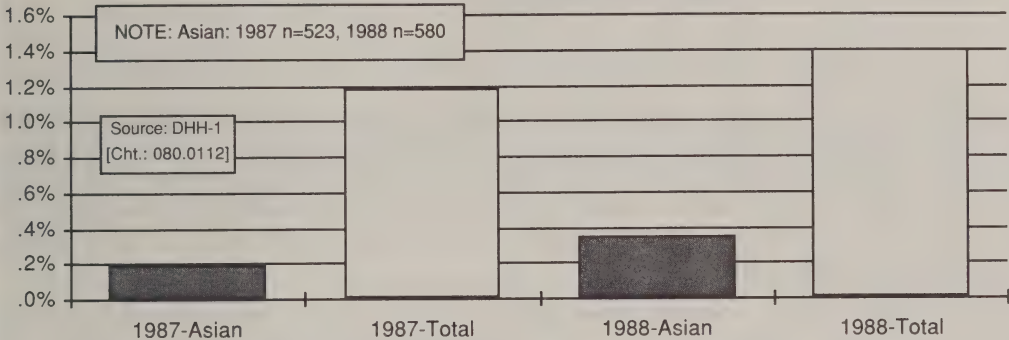
As a proportion of the population as a whole, the following are the top ten causes of death for Asian Americans (DHH-1). The lack of consistency of most frequent cause of death between 1987 and 1988 is probably the result of the small sample size — 71 persons for both years.

**1987**

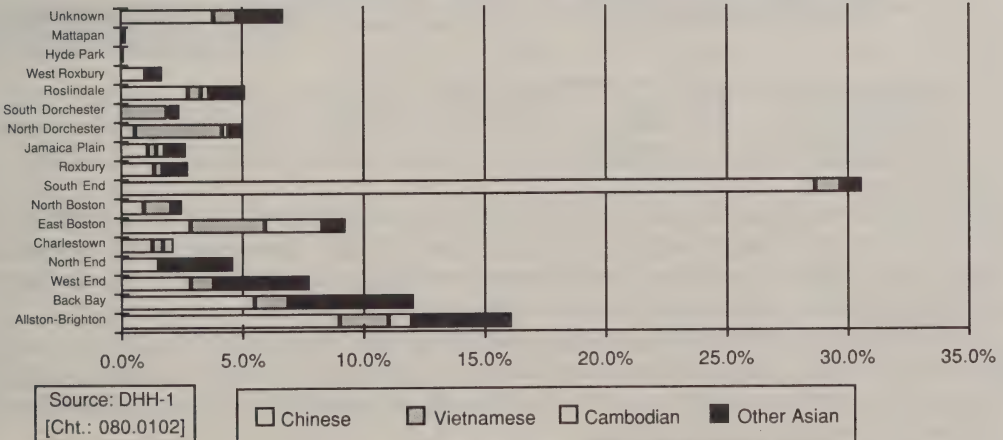
Lip, Oral, Pharynx	3.2%
Urinary	2.9%
Motor Vehicle	2.6%
Digestive & Peritonitis	2.5%
Nephritis, etc.	2.5%
All Other Causes	2.3%
Other, Unspecified	2.2%
Genital	2.1%
Septicemia	1.9%
Cirrhosis	1.9%

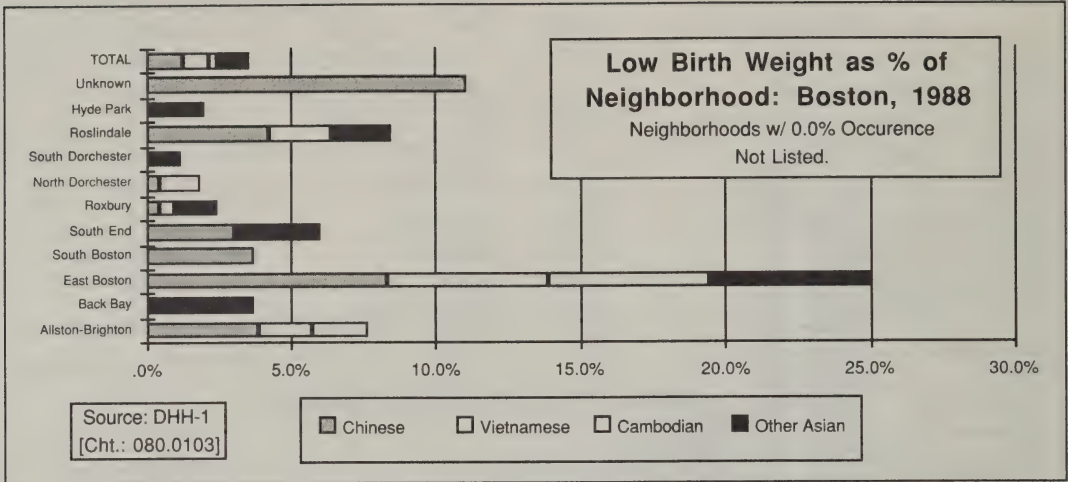
**1988**

Cerebrovascular	3.5%
Congenital Anomaly	3.2%
Pneumonia & Flu	3.1%
Other Accidents	3.0%
Nephritis, Etc.	2.6%
Septicemia	2.5%
Leukemia	2.4%
Perinatal	2.4%
Suicide	2.2%
Other Cancer	1.6%

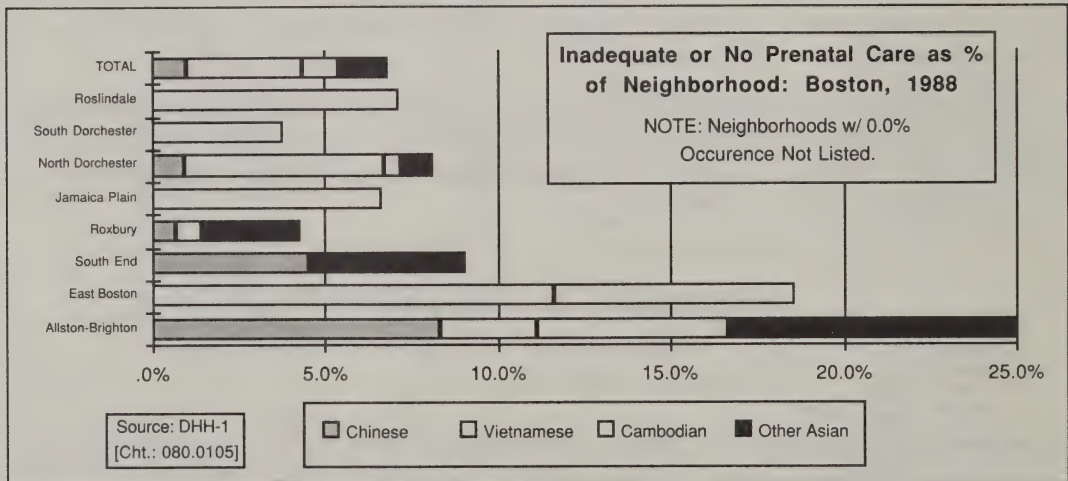
**Infant Deaths as % of Asians/All Boston**

Infant mortality rates among Asian Americans appear to be better than for the city in general, with one death out of 528 in 1987 and two deaths out of 580 in 1988. This produces an infant mortality rate of .2 percent and .3 percent respectively, as compared to 1.2 percent and 1.4 percent for the city as a whole.

**Asian Births as % of Neighborhood: Total, 1988**



However, low birth weight appears to be a problem for infants born to mothers in East Boston. Asian Americans constitute 3.8 percent of East Boston's population, and account for 9.3 percent of infants born there. Asians account for nine of the 36 infants from East Boston found to have a low birth weight. Asian Americans are 3 percent of the population of Roslindale and account for a little over 5 percent of the births there, but were 8.5 percent or four of 47 of those infants with low birth weight.

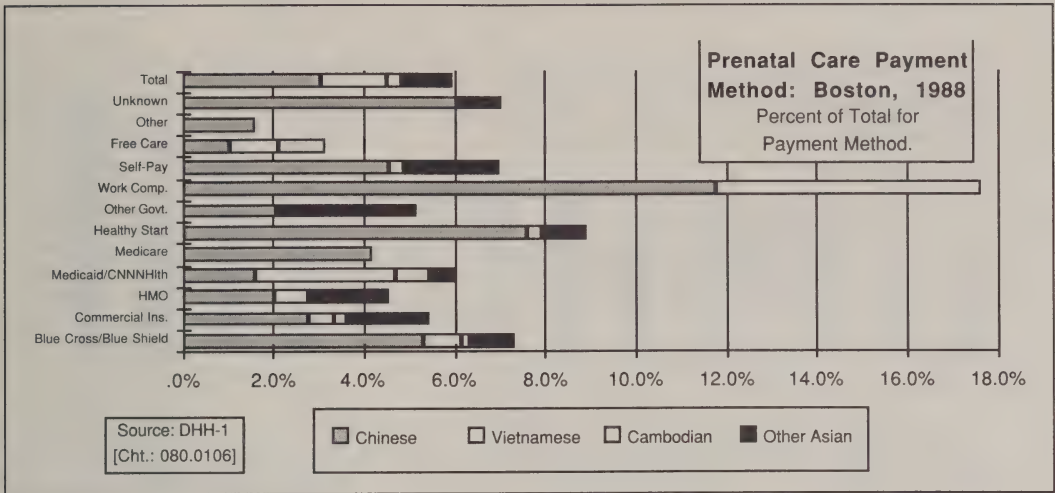


The above chart does not explain why the birth weights of infants from the East Boston and Roslindale neighborhoods were not up to standard. While Vietnamese and Cambodian infants were apparently not receiving adequate prenatal care, this does not account for the Chinese and "other Asians" with low birth weight.

Dr. Chin of the South Cove Community Health Center noted that Asian cultures include traditional diets for pregnant women which apparently work to ensure a healthy baby. In America, however, some elements of these diets are not available, and so may contribute to increased pre- or post-natal problems.

"Inadequate prenatal care" is based on American standards, and may not take into account the wisdom contained in Asian cultural traditions. Such traditions at least helped to ensure the survival of the group in Asia, and may contribute to the health of the child in America.





Of those Asian Americans who were able to afford prenatal care, 44.5 percent used some form of government-sponsored health insurance such as Medicaid, Healthy Start, or Medicare. A little less than four percent either paid out of their own pockets or received “free care.”

The proportion of Asian Americans in Boston covered by some form of health insurance is not known. Dr. Chin states that 56 percent of Chinatown’s residents have no health insurance. One of the primary advantages of garment work, the major industry for Boston’s Chinese women, is the union contract, which includes health insurance. This is important not only for prenatal care, but for family care in general, since the husbands of garment workers who work in the Chinese restaurant industry are, for the most part, not covered by any health insurance. The declining garment industry has therefore caused a crisis for Chinese immigrant families, because when the women are displaced from their union jobs, they lose not only important income, but also their family’s health benefits.

## MENTAL HEALTH

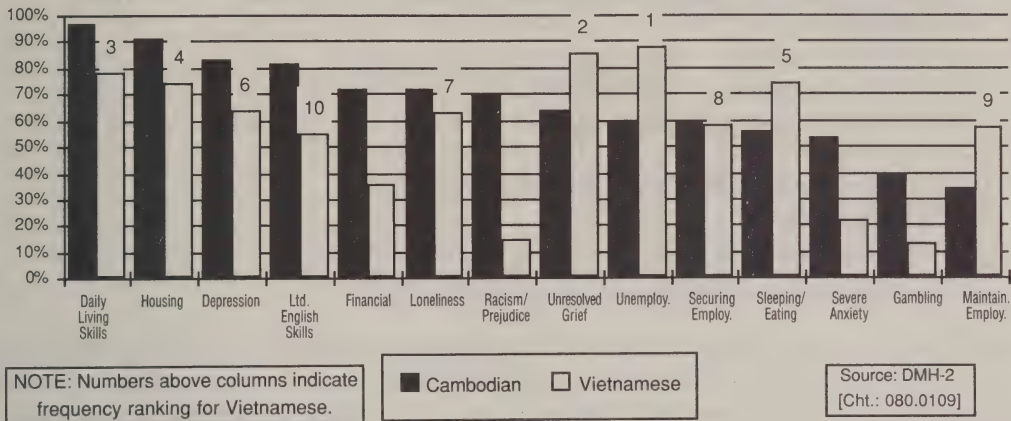
The issue of mental health, from an American perspective, is a complicated one for the Asian American community. The techniques of American psychotherapy, which require the articulation of feelings and discussion of problems with a stranger, are not congruent with Asian styles of interpersonal relations. Psychological interpretations based on European/Anglo-Saxon theories of the psyche are not necessarily transferable in meaning in an Asian American context. Even behavioral therapy, which in theory might be conducted without the use of language, still takes place within a cultural context to which meanings are inevitably given. In 1985, the Massachusetts Department of Health and Human Services and the Massachusetts Office of Refugee Resettlement entered into an interagency agreement with the National Institute of Mental Health to encourage the development and implementation of culturally relevant diagnostic and treatment procedures.

Barriers To Accessing Mental Health Services	Cambodian		Vietnamese	
	Rank*		Rank	
Uncomfortable sharing problem with stranger	80%	1	87%	1
Lack of understanding of mental health concepts	80%	2	82%	3
Feels ashamed going to mental health center	73%	3	82%	4
No bilingual staff	72%	4	83%	2
Does not consider problem mental health related	66%	5	79%	5
Services not culturally familiar	64%	6	67%	8
Unaware that mental health services exist	64%	7	64%	9
Lack of trust in mental health services	61%	8	68%	7
Afraid of stigma	59%	9	75%	6
Western treatment model considered not culturally appropriate	56%	10	61%	
Counseling/Psychological Therapy considered not culturally appropriate	49%		64%	10
Fear problem will be misunderstood and misdiagnosed	49%		35%	

\* Percent of the time problem is cited as "very important" by interviewee. Interviewee was allowed to choose as many responses as appropriate. Percent figure is proportion of time the item is selected (DMH-2, p. 24, table 7).

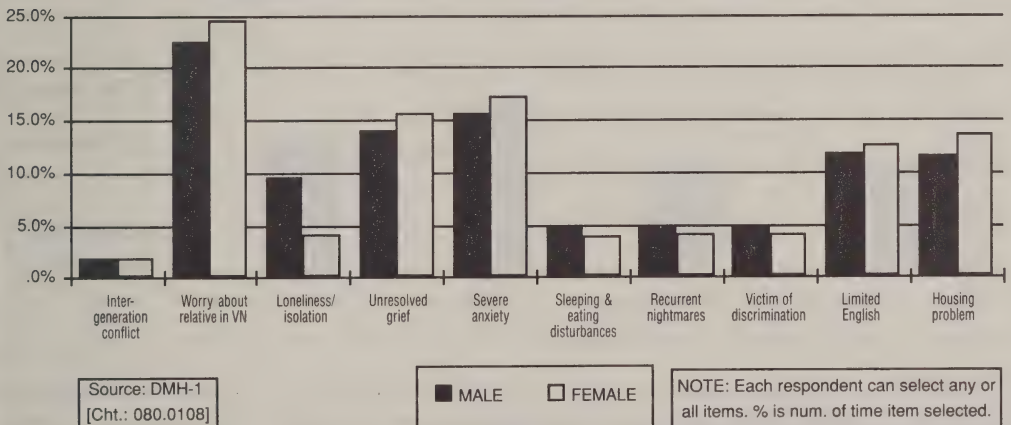
Mental health disorders have been identified as a major problem within the refugee community. The GAO cites a 1986–1987 study conducted in California which found that "40 percent of the 2,773 refugees interviewed had a moderate or severe need for mental health treatment." The study reported that "most Southeast Asian refugees interviewed were forced to spend years in camps awaiting resettlement, and more than half experienced separations from, or deaths of, family members. Cambodian and Laotian refugees spent an average of nearly three years in the refugee camps, and nearly two-thirds of the Cambodians had lost close relatives." It was not unexpected, therefore that "16 percent of the Cambodians interviewed met the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder" (GAO-1, p. 36). The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health's 1989 Refugee Mental Health Needs Assessment (DMH-2) noted that in addition to experiencing almost continuous war in their homeland for decades, as well as traumas resulting from Communist "re-education" camps and their escape, many Vietnamese also still "have family members remaining in Vietnam. The separation of families and the resulting emotional burden for those in the United States has been identified as a key factor in increased levels of stress and depression in the Vietnamese community" (DMH-2, p. 5). The experience of Cambodian refugees has many parallels with that of the Vietnamese. Similar, if not even more extreme, levels of stress, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder reflecting the Khmer Rouge holocaust are likely to exist in this community in Boston and elsewhere in the United States today.

## Frequent Refugee Problems, Cambodian &amp; Vietnamese: Mass., 1989



The DMH study surveyed “key informants” for “frequently experienced problems” of Cambodian, Vietnamese and Haitian refugees. It found that “overall, the top five problems identified by the average of ‘very often’ response by key informants for all three ethnic groups were, ‘housing’; ‘limited English skills’; ‘daily living skills’; ‘depression’; and ‘unresolved grief’” (DMH-2, p. 13).

## Vietnamese: Problems Experienced: Mass., 1986



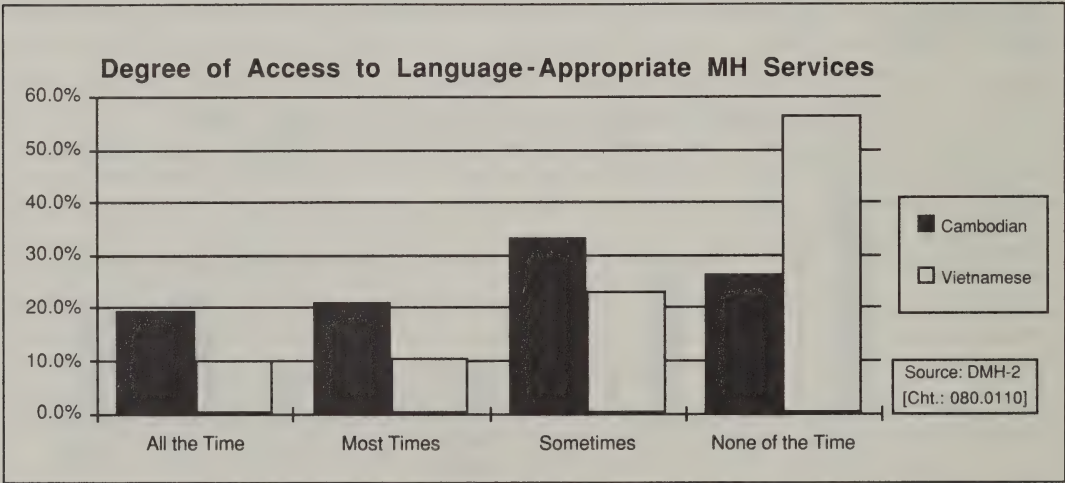
An earlier study by the DMH of the Vietnamese community in Massachusetts surveyed problems experienced by males and females. In this survey, proportionally the same number of males and females experienced most problems, with the exception of “loneliness/isolation,” which 9.6 percent of males compared to 4.2 percent of females experienced. Relevant to this statistic, the report notes that the perils of the escape limited the number of female refugees, resulting in lack of spouses for men here. The relatively smaller number of women in the community “creates many difficulties” (DMH-1, p. 10), with loneliness being one obvious result.



Top 5 Barriers to Receiving Mental Health Services	Cambodian	Vietnamese
Language barrier (no bilingual, bicultural personnel)	79	76
Lack of interpreters trained in mental health issues and terminology	54	42
Client refused services	40	45
Lack of transportation	32	17
Service provider indicates not know how to help client	26	
Lack of communication between mental health care givers & consumer		
Family discourages patient		21

[Priority determined by weighted score.] [Source: DMH-2, p. 25]

Should a refugee seek or require help with a psychological problem, there are significant barriers to receiving that help. The barrier listed by DMH informants as most important for both Vietnamese and Cambodians was “language barrier (no bilingual/bicultural personnel).” Some of the other barriers such as “lack of interpreters trained in mental health issues and terminology” and “service provider indicates not know how to help client” are also related to this first barrier, suggesting the need for Cambodians and Vietnamese who are trained in mental health treatment and who can relate to their clients through their own cultures.



The DMH survey also asked specifically about the degree of access to “language-appropriate” mental health services. Access to appropriate mental health services “none of the time” or “sometimes” was reported by 59.6 percent of Cambodian respondents and 79.5 percent of the Vietnamese.

*From Barriers  
to Dreams*





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# *From Barriers to Dreams*

During the 19th and 20th centuries, immigrants entering Boston found a city that needed a large number of unskilled workers. These entry-level jobs provided a foundation for advancement. Today, advancement beyond unskilled employment requires far more capital than hard work and loyalty to an employer. Although poverty in the past had been associated with not working, the service sector economy has created a growing class that is both poor *and* working. Furthermore, this comes at a time when prior Federal and state commitments to providing a safety net for the poor are evaporating.

This study has found that Asian Americans' quality of life is directly affected by how they come to America, where they come from, and the conditions and attitudes they find when they arrive. Our current economy and working environment is just one of these conditions.

Asians living in America will find a lack of role models in the mass media, and their reality clouded and confused by stereotypes. We have talked about the damaging use of the "model minority" stereotype and its implicit denial of poverty in the Asian American community. Competing with this is the "yellow peril" stereotype currently exemplified by Japan-bashing and reporting on Asian gangs. While gangs do exist, as they do in most poor communities, analysts seldom connect their existence to the lack of opportunity and community resources which go hand in hand with poverty.

Another problem of perception for Asian Americans is that they are not appropriate for leadership roles. This view underlies the "glass ceiling" dynamic in which an employee may believe that she or he has unlimited opportunity for advancement, but in fact is unable to advance because of an invisible barrier of convention and expectation.

Finally, there is the perception that immigrants, especially refugees, are a drain on the economy. This characterization apparently resonated with many voters during the 1990 gubernatorial primary, which brought into the final election a candidate who accused refugees of moving to Massachusetts for the welfare benefits. National studies as well as a report by the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants have found, to the contrary, that refugees and immigrants as a whole contribute more through taxes, productivity, and consumer purchasing than they receive in benefits. But little attention had been paid to these economic contributions.

The power and prevalence of these stereotypic images confuse the issues and contribute to the problem of poverty in the Asian American community. In order to refocus meaningful public policy, an aggressive agenda of community-based research and advocacy is critical.

Moreover, this study has found an outstanding lack of research material on Asian Americans and poverty in general. While this report is a summary of data on Asian Americans that we found to be relatively accessible, the information in these studies is often inconsistent or lacks sufficient detail.

It is important to note that Asian Americans continue to try to improve the conditions of their lives both individually and collectively. They maintain a relatively high rate of multiple worker families, for instance, and overcrowding in many American Asian households is a strategy to economize and cope with the high cost of living in Boston.

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Asian Americans have also engaged in collective efforts to force the government to fulfill its obligation to its citizens, to ensure that institutions deal fairly with the community, and to demand that employers return fair value for work received.

These efforts have won immigrants job retraining combined with English-as-a-Second-Language classes and, at least for a time, bilingual staff to assist Asian Americans in filing for unemployment benefits. Collective organizing has also fought back the destruction of Chinatown by institutional expansion and, in a recent victory, won back-wages for aggrieved Chinatown restaurant workers. There is a growing awareness within the community that participation in the political process is essential to making long-term gains.

Activists in the Asian American community recognize that organizing to address specific community issues, even when successful, is a difficult and draining process. Proactive measures such as developing community-based institutions and networks are also necessary to building the community's capacity to conduct comprehensive research, to shape policy, and to develop long-term strategies for economic development and political empowerment. This process of capacity-building is crucial to developing a community which meets the needs of all its members.

Poverty is not simply an issue for particular groups. If most Asian Americans can only find low-skilled and low-paying jobs because our economy lacks a diverse base, our society will not benefit from the potential of all its people, and poverty will continue to exist. Yet Asian Americans are frequently left to their own devices to overcome social and structural barriers resulting from institutional exclusion and neglect — and reinforced by pervasive stereotypes and misconceptions.

Recognizing the realities and complexities of Asian Americans in Boston, as this report has attempted to do, is a basic but essential step forward.

Many specific recommendations are offered in several of the reports utilized in this study, including:

- English Plus legislation;
- targeted employment assistance strategies; and
- multilingual community outreach and education efforts.

We support these recommendations and urge their continued advocacy.

However, the most striking finding that emerges from compiling this study is much more basic. Quite simply, little attention has been paid to issues of poverty affecting Asian Americans in Boston.

In summary, we urge the following:

First, that consensus be developed among appropriate foundations, government agencies, service agencies, image makers, and community organizations to recognize and respond institutionally to the reality of Asian American poverty in Boston.

And finally, that the capacity be developed within the Asian American community, in coordination with appropriate foundations, public agencies, and universities, to conduct ongoing and systematic research and policy analysis, and programmatic initiatives on issues and trends related to poverty and Asian Americans in Boston.

Many critical questions remain unanswered by this report. Clearly, more focused attention on the issue of poverty among Asian Americans in Boston is necessary. While this report serves as a significant step forward, it is only the beginning.

# *Resources on the Asian American Community*





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# *Resources on the Asian American Community*

*Compiled by Dr. Peter N. Kiang*

## **PUBLICATIONS**

The following publications provide important information and perspectives about Asian Americans in Boston in formats that are more accessible than the technical reports that serve as the basis for this study on poverty. Each of the publications listed below is available at the Asian American Resource Workshop, 34 Oak Street, Boston, MA, 02111; (617) 426-5313.

**Asian American Resource Workshop.** *The 1990–91 Massachusetts Asian American/Pacific Islander Directory, Boston.* Asian American Resource Workshop, Boston, 1990.

This comprehensive resource guide lists nearly every Asian community organization in Boston and across the state. The address, phone number, and brief mission statement of each organization is included along with listings of other groups that offer services or programming relevant to the Asian American communities.

**Asian American Resource Workshop and Wen-ti Tsen.** *The Asian American Comic Book.* Asian American Resource Workshop, Boston, 1991.

Based on individual and collective experiences of Asian Americans in Boston, this unique publication describes in powerful words and pictures the stories of four individuals — a Japanese American concentration camp internee, an immigrant Indian woman in college, a Cambodian refugee father, and a Chinese immigrant garment worker. The stories realistically depict the struggles and conflicts faced by Asian Americans in Boston and allow the reader to share their demands and dreams for better lives. The impact of poverty and the people's dignity are expressed with a quality that statistical studies cannot capture.

**Chu, Doris C.J. and Glenn Braverman.** *The Chinese in Massachusetts: Their Experiences and Contributions.* Chinese Culture Institute, Boston, 1987.

This collection includes a detailed discussion of the development of the Boston Chinatown community since its beginnings in 1875. Rarely seen historical photographs accompany the text. A chapter on discrimination provides a framework to understand the historical roots of inequality that have shaped the context of poverty in Chinatown today.

**Higgins, James and Joan Ross. *Southeast Asians: A New Beginning in Lowell*. Mill Town Graphics, Lowell, 1986.**

With text in English, Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese, this collection captures the spirit and struggles of emerging Southeast Asian communities through words and photographs. Though focusing on the city of Lowell, the issues and experiences portrayed are shared by Southeast Asians in Boston.

**Kiang, Peter N. *Southeast Asian Parent Empowerment: The Challenge of Changing Demographics in Lowell, Massachusetts*. Monograph #1. Massachusetts Association for Bilingual Education, 1990.**

Though focused on Lowell rather than Boston, this monograph documents the social and political challenges to a city and its institutions that result from dramatic demographic change. Focusing on Southeast Asian refugee parents seeking educational equity for their children, this study offers a useful introduction to issues facing Southeast Asian communities, particularly in relation to education and political empowerment.

**Kiang, Peter and Vivian Lee. *Our Roots in History*. Asian American Resource Workshop, Boston, 1982.**

Produced to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first Chinese Exclusion Act, this volume offers a concise historical overview of Asian American immigration, settlement, and labor with special emphasis on the Chinese community in Boston. The text is bilingual in English and Chinese.

**Song, Elaine. *To Live in Peace: Responding to Anti-Asian Violence in Boston*. Asian American Resource Workshop, Boston, 1987.**

A comprehensive analysis of the rise in anti-Asian violence in Boston during the 1980s, this report presents data from the Boston Police Community Disorders Unit and case studies of both problems and interventions in Dorchester, East Boston, and Chinatown as well as in Revere and Somerville. This report offers significant recommendations for law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and community organizations, and includes an excellent discussion of the meaning of empowerment in Boston's Asian American community.

In addition, the SAMPAN serves as the community's biweekly newspaper, published in English and Chinese. Contact the SAMPAN at 90 Tyler Street, Boston, MA 02111. Most organizations listed in the 1990–91 Massachusetts Asian American/Pacific Islander Directory, including the AARW, have newsletters with relevant and timely information about Asian Americans in Boston.



## **MEDIA PRODUCTIONS**

Though publications are an essential source of information, media productions are often more accessible and powerful in reaching interested audiences. Each of the following videos is available at the AARW, and offers important insights into the realities of Boston's Asian American communities.

**Boston Chinatown History.** Produced by the AARW in 1982, this 20-minute video documentary traces the historical development of Boston Chinatown and presents a good overview of critical community issues.

**The Long Road to Justice.** Produced by the AARW in 1987, this 25-minute video documents the 1985 struggle of Long Guang Huang, a Chinese immigrant who was beaten and arrested by a Boston Police detective in Chinatown. The video highlights the successful process of community organizing that led to Mr. Huang's freedom.

**Pei-Lee: Portrait of a Chinatown Teenager.** Produced by the AARW in 1984, this 30-minute video reveals the hopes and conflicts experienced by a young woman growing up in Boston's Chinatown.

**Through Strength and Struggle.** Produced by the AARW in collaboration with the Chinese Progressive Association in 1988, this 30-minute documentary chronicles the inspiring story of the P&L garment workers — a group of Chinese immigrant women, laid off when their plant closes, who organize themselves and in the process not only win significant victories for immigrant communities and displaced workers, but also develop new visions of themselves as leaders.

**Violence Against Asians.** Produced by WNEV-TV with assistance from the AARW in 1988, this 52-minute video presents powerful case studies of anti-Asian violence and community responses in Boston, Revere, Lowell, Natick, and Wellesley.



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**BHA-1:** “Civil Rights — Racial Breakdown by Development for Current Residents as of 04 Feb 1991.” Boston Housing Authority computer printout.

**BPS-1:** “Annual and Cohort Dropout Rates in Boston Public Schools: Focus on Programmatic and Demographic Characteristics, 1990.” Boston Public Schools, Office of Research and Development, November, 1990. Leslie Horst, Senior Research Analyst.

**BPS-2:** Boston Public Schools Systemwide, school standardized test results: “Metropolitan Achievement Test Scores.” 1990.

**BRA-1:** *Boston at Mid-Decade: Results of the 1985 Household Survey. I: Demographic Characteristics.* Boston Redevelopment Authority, Boston Housing Authority, July, 1986.

**BRA-2:** *Profile of Boston's Chinatown Neighborhood,* Boston Redevelopment Authority, Boston Housing Authority, June, 1987.

**BRA-3:** *Profile of Boston's Chinatown Neighborhood.* Boston Redevelopment Authority, Ting Fun-Yeh, Boston Housing Authority, 1987.

**BRA-4:** *Chinatown Housing Survey.* Boston Redevelopment Authority, Gregory W. Perkins and Deborah A. Oriola, Boston Housing Authority, December, 1987.

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